

I Love Troublemakers, It's Trouble I Hate

By Larry Castagnola, S.J.





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A Reflection on 8 years in a Boys's Home

LARRY CASTAGNOLA, S.J.

For

Mother and Dad

And all those who help the Family

Introduction

This is a collection of stories about a Boys' Home. The events and characters of these pages are real. Only the names have been changed.

This Home began in 1970 with the official title of "Castagnola's Family, Inc." The "Inc." was put there by the State of California who recognized us as a non-profit corporation. And presently the "Family" consists of two community group homes licensed by the State Department of Health for the care of 16 boys ages 12 through 18.

My stories about the boys are somewhat fragmented — like biblical narratives. Part I is straight factual narration with no literary embellishments. Part II finds me encountering a literary figure, Professor Reganeet (whose name backwards is "Teenager"). Yet Part II is no less factual than Part I though the literary genre of "socratic dialogue" is employed to hold the reader's interest.

As books are published for birdwatchers, this is one of the many published for "teenager-watchers." For what more can one do for a young person than offer watchful concern.

The inspiration for the title came from a boy's remark (ch. 16): "Father, you wouldn't be in this work if you didn't love trouble." And since I had in 1970 published a book entitled: *I Love Youth, It's Teenagers I Hate*, I felt a moral obligation of reversing the word position of "hate."

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1	Birth Pangs.....
2	Aborted Sixteen Yearold.....
3	High Rider
4	Full Circle.....
5	The Detective's Art
6	Home Sweet Streets
7	The Cinderella Syndrome
8	Playing Cops and Robbers.....
9	Spare Cigarettes.....
10	Exor-system
11	Trophy Collector
12	The Question of Blood Money
13	My Great Escape
14	Angry Ever Since.....
15	Biting the Hand
16	I Love Trouble?
17	Home Brew.....
18	Torn Shirt Therapy
19	The Case of the Broken Crutch.....
20	The Many Uses of a Commode
21	A Moment of Power.....
22	Kite Flying as a Life Model.....
23	The Psychiatric Tatoo
24	Crying Wolf
25	The Adventures of Dr. I
26	The Informer
27	An Act of God?.....
28	Kidnapped with a Blessing

29 Christmas Eve
30 Rescue
31 Book of Records
32 A Confirmed Pedestrian
33 The Recruiter
34 Institutional Addict
35 On the Run
36 The Cost
37 The System Breaker
38 An Anthropological Thought.....
39 A New Metaphysics.....
40 Forced Vacation
41 Psychic Phenomena
42 The Sting of Life

Part II

1 Eating Habits
2 Room Decor.....
3 Wall Scars.....
4 The Problem of Homosexuality.....
5 Adolescents and Religion.....
6 The Potential Alcoholic
7 Juvenile Delinquency
8 Ethnic Backgrounds.....
9 The Challenging Placement.....
10 Negative Attention
11 The Meaning of Therapy.....
12 Ratio of Success

I

Birth Pangs

At age 37 I became father of seven boys. It wasn't spectacular — like having septuplets in the natural order of birth. In my case the womb was a juvenile detention center which housed the beyond-controls. The midwife was a probation officer. The stork was a juvenile court judge. And that primal scream at the time of delivery? I suppose it was partly mine.

Of the seven, only one was premature. This was Jerry, a 16 year old, who had failed in other homes and was being given a last chance with me before a commitment to the Youth Authority. He couldn't make it on the outs. And the institution with its steel womb reclaimed him.

Jerry survived 20 hours in our Home before he ran away. He didn't give me a chance to grow vain about my ability to attract youth. His main interest was getting stoned. Though new to Sacramento and many miles from his neighborhood, it took him five minutes to find out where to get his dope and another 15 minutes to get it. Being 16 he had immediate access to marijuana.

During the one evening he lived as a charter member of Castagnola's Family, Inc., he wrote a letter to a friend which he left behind.

"Dear Marcos,

How's your new group home? This place is pretty far out. Me and this other dude were the first people here. I went to a park and scored my first stuff in Sacramento. Smoked some tonight. And its pretty good. Man, am I going to get fat here. The preacher who runs the place lets you eat when you want to and I eat all the time. Are you going to stay straight? I can't think of much to say so have a good trip.

Peace,
Love,
Stone,
Jerry

With Jerry, the premature one, I the “preacher” was awakened to the reality of the teenager, independent and rebellious, yet mysteriously drawn back to the security of the institution. He only lasted one day “on the run” before he was picked up.

From Jerry I became more aware of the mystical hold marijuana has over the adolescent mind, a kind of religion with icons, incense, sacred vessels, meetings of initiates, and the sharing of a life style.

I learned that you don’t get too close to kids like Jerry. I probably scared him off by all the attention he got as an original of the Home. He wasn’t ready for me, and I wasn’t ready for him. The other six, Mike Wood, Michael Cardonel, Sammy Ortiz, Steve Dawson, Mark Tarryton and Bruce Tyrone fared better.

2

Aborted Sixteen Yearold

“Mike is interfering with our lives. I don’t see why we have to put up with his demands. You have to get rid of him.”

Mike Wood was eavesdropping as his stepmother pleaded her case with his father. He was angered. Yet instead of bursting into the room and confronting his stepmother with her scheme “to get rid of him”, he overdosed on her medication. And stepmother, as though fulfilling a part in a script prepared by the Brothers Grimm, had her day. Mike was put on probation and detained in juvenile hall for his “attempted suicide.” It was under these circumstances that he was placed in our Home.

Unlike Jerry, Mike was a short-haired, straight-look-

ing boy who took pleasure in relating to adults. He achieved in school. And when he graduated from our home after a stay of seven months, he joined the Navy. Always trying to please the adults in his life, he thought the military would bring him recognition and approval. He sent us pictures of himself in uniform and it was obvious he had a sense of pride in his achievement. And the day he returned to the Home in his Navy whites, one could perceive he fancied himself one-up on his less ambitious peers.

But the glory of his military career was short-lived. He was discharged after six months and the reasons were rather obscure. His discharge was labeled "psychiatric", a term which can include a multitude of sins. In his case the "sin" was an attempt of some officers to make him their "pretty boy." And he buckled under the pressure.

He appeared again on our doorstep. This time he was an adult of 18. He was out of the Navy, out of a job and had a case of hepatitis for good measure. I gave him some employment. And I co-signed a loan for \$1000. so he could buy a car. But within two weeks he had the car totaled. I was stuck with the payments and he conveniently disappeared.

I learned some things from Mike. I was to see again and again how the cruelty of a stepmother could wreck havoc with a boy's sexual identity. I learned how stupid, or as they say in psychiatric jargon "counterproductive", it was to co-sign a loan. But most of all, I was becoming aware of the fact that problem children don't change in six months. In Mike's case he was described by a good clinical psychologist as one who was "chronically socially and emotionally maladjusted, one who was unrealistic and unwilling to accept responsibility for much of his behavior".

We didn't change him or rehabilitate him. Being in our Home didn't make his problems disappear. But perhaps at some time in the future we may stand in his memory by contrast to the parent who wanted to get rid of him.

3

High Rider

Sam Ortiz kept a diary while he was in our Home. It was a secret diary; and, therefore, I knew nothing of it. It was only after he left the Home that I discovered it. It appeared one morning on the living room floor. On the cover was the warning: "This diary is secret so Father and his staff better keep out." With that kind of a threat, I naturally had to open the book. Actually, the entries were all repetitious and told me nothing I already didn't know. The first page began with a wisdom saying: "Today is a new kind of stone age." The illusion was to the reality Sam knew best, the adolescent world of drugs. I was not too impressed by the new kind of stone age. Our cavemen ancestors had some better insights and life styles.

Sammy Ortiz would have done perfectly in our Home if he hadn't been in love with drugs. He was a good worker and had a friendly manner. And he had the affectionate nature of a dutiful son. Part of his evening ritual was to fall asleep on my bed with the result of my dragging him to his room.

The way drugs did-in this loving child happened in this manner. He and another boy from the Home, Dusty, smoked some "good" marijuana while on a walk. They were feeling fine. There wasn't a care in their minds. They passed by a few cars parked in the street, and to their surprise someone had left the keys in an ignition. So they went for a joyride. About ten miles later Sammy noticed a red light flashing behind him. He looked at his partner, but Dusty didn't have any advice for him. He tried to outrace the cops. But the sheriff radioed for help. An unmarked sheriff's car came to the rescue, driving towards Sam and Dusty.

Sam didn't get a chance to enter the incident in his diary. How do you explain the fact you drove a stolen car right into an unmarked sheriff's car?

4

Full Circle

As a young Jesuit I picked up the avocation of barbering. We straight people of the '50's submitted to weekly haircuts.

How different were the early '70's. The adolescents equated long hair with "The Good, the True and The Beautiful."

One evening in 1971 I had to carry out a threat. I had promised the six boys of the Home haircuts if they were caught indulging in alcohol. They did their drinking. And the spraying of cologne couldn't cancel the odor. All were guilty. And my office became at once a prison barbershop.

Steve volunteered to go first. Like a death-row inmate ordering a last meal, he put on his favorite record which had the refrain: "what cha gonna do about me?". But he accepted his fate in stoic sobriety.

Mark, by contrast, was not accepting. And his manner of coping with crisis led to the formulation of an important law of adolescent psychology called: "The Six Phases of Behavior When Faced with an Ultimatum for a Haircut" or more simply, "Mark's Law." The Phases are as follows:

Phase I — Denial. When the patient hears the verdict "haircut" solemnly announced, he hides under bedcovers or uses other subterfuge which either implies innocence, unwillingness or unconcern.

Phase II — The Plea. When the agent does not react to the subterfuge but insists in carrying out the sentence, i.e., haircut, the patient resorts to simple reason: "cutting my hair won't change the way I think". When this doesn't gain ground, he begs: "Please don't cut my hair."

Phase III — Threat of Assault. When the agent persists with his intention the patient uses a scare tactic: "I'll kill anyone who touches my hair."

Phase IV — Threat of Suicide. The patient is usually surprised when Phase III is ineffective. If he does not enter

into actual combat with the agent, he will resort to the ultimate sympathy-getter: "I'll kill myself if I have to get a haircut."

Phase V — Threat of Runaway. When the patient gets no mileage from talk of suicide, he begins to pack his belongings. He announces his intention of runaway like the child who wants his parent to provide him with a sack lunch for the journey.

Phase VI — Reluctant Acceptance. If the patient does not in fact run away, he will back down especially if a precedent has been set by another peer who has submitted to a trim. If fate is accepted he will want to play suitable protest music or give meticulous directions to agent about styling.

Mark went through phases one to six (as is obvious by the fact his name is given to the law). Bruce had received a haircut at the request of his probation officer the previous week. All he did was enter Phase IV by putting a knife to his wrist saying: "I want to go to heaven where things will be better." And Howard who had short hair to begin with entered Phase V. He ran away to the corner gas station where he called from five minutes later with the request to come back.

The penultimate victim was Sammy Ortiz. Being cunning, he outmaneuvered me and the Phases of Mark's Law. He maintained his tonsils were inflamed and he needed immediate medical attention. His claim was true. I took him to the hospital — without a haircut. The other boys never forgot my double standard. I had lost my impetus after his penecillan shot.

Last in line was Mike Cardonel. I gave him a moderate trim but he did not seem satisfied. He asked me for the electric clippers to do some touch-up work. He and Steve went into the bathroom and when the two emerged minutes later Cardonel was bald. In this prophetic gesture I feel he tried to tell me: "You have no power over me."

Cardonel shaved his head in 1971 — his last year in our Home. He came back for a visit in 1978 with a thick, shaggy mane past his shoulders in length. I was glad to see

Cardonel and had no idea of the request he was to make on this his first official visitation.

“Say, Cas, how about a haircut? I got a job interview tomorrow. I need to get rid of this stuff.”

If the shock of seeing Cardonel after so many years was not bad enough, his request really sent my head spinning. I threw a towel over him and a new generation of boys watched in amazement as chunks of hair fell to the ground.

As a Home we had completed some kind of circle, but I’m not sure what it meant.

5

The Detective’s Art

In my studies for the priesthood I took no courses in criminology. Thus I had to become a self-taught detective.

My first big case as an STD came in 1971 when Harold reported his bicycle stolen. It was in the course of solving this theft that I formulated Harold’s Law (in honor of the victim). This law contains 5 principles:

- 1) Don’t presume the theft to be an outside job.
- 2) Declare martial law until the stolen article is restored or restitution is made.
- 3) Search the entire premises.
- 4) Interrogate everyone, pretending you know more than you do.
- 5) Reach a decision within a few days.

In the case of Harold’s missing bicycle, the case was solved at the first interrogation. While in many other cases over the years my suspects condemned themselves by the internal inconsistency of alibis, the suspect in this case,

Howard Hastings, condemned himself as he opened his mouth. He didn't bother to say: "I don't know anything." Instead he said: "I'm taking the fifth."

Being a probation ward, Howard was well-schooled in the fact that he had a right to a public defender. He had memorized the admonition of the Miranda Law. Instead of remaining silent, he proclaimed his right to remain silent and thereby convicted himself. Little did he realize that I was not holding my own court according to the TV or real world models.

Instead of reading Howard his rights, I informed him of his conviction. He was puzzled. I wasn't following his script. I didn't allow him to proclaim his innocence.

"I'm taking the fifth... you can't accuse me."

"I'm accusing you on the evidence of your taking the fifth..."

Now my only job was to regain the bicycle. I still had pressure working for me since under rule 2 of Harold's Law, martial law was to continue until the article was restored or restitution agreed upon. And, as always is the case when group pressure is applied, an informer told me Howard sold the bicycle to a school shop teacher. I phoned the teacher. He verified paying Howard \$30 for the ten-speed. But when I asked Howard for the money, he sadly informed me that the check given him by his teacher was quite accidentally destroyed in his laundry.

"Show me the check, Howard." He produced a crumpled piece of paper which had obviously gone through the washing machine. But it was just as obviously paper towel.

"Howard would you give me the money so I can give it back to your teacher, get Harold's bike and release martial law."

He remained silent for a while. Then he asked me for a tweezers.

"Are you changing the subject, Howard? You have a nerve!"

"No, get me a tweezers."

I complied. And Howard carefully, like a nurse

removing a splinter from sensitive flesh, removed the tightly rolled thirty dollars from the lining of his jacket.

"That was just in case I needed to run away," he added.

6

Home Sweet Streets

Howard Hastings did eventually run away. His motive was the fact I restricted him and Michael Cardonel for staying out one night. After giving their situation some thought, he and Cardonel bid me adieu one morning and left a note in the bathroom: "Father, we hate to do this, but we're getting a lawyer." And in fact the two did consult a lawyer about my right to restrict them. After a few phone conversations with the boys and their lawyer, Cardonel returned and Hastings disappeared. I filed the missing person's report on Hastings.

We had heard nothing from Hastings for the next month. Then a phone call came for Cardonel. It was Hastings calling long distance from LA. I eaves-dropped:

"I'm in Hollywood. . . . I have a job . . . I might be in the movies. There's big money here . . . I can get you a job. I'll be up in a week . . . You can come with me then. . . ."

I discussed the conversation with Cardonel. He assured me he would not be lured by grandiose schemes. He was aware of Howard's propensity to exaggerate. But a week later he disappeared. The bait of big money was too much.

Eight months passed and I hadn't heard from either boy. Then Cardonel called me from San Francisco.

“This is Mike. I need a ride. I’m at Union Square. Come and get me. I give up.”

As though following some dramatic script by calling me at midnight, Cardonel was perfectly confident that I would rescue him. And I did. He was there at Union Square. And he looked like someone who had been on the streets for several months, dirty, dissheveled and drunk. He obviously hadn’t made it in the movies. He realized he needed the structured discipline of the juvenile system. I delivered him to the juvenile hall where he got a solid month of daily baths and routine before returning to our home.

There was still no word from Hastings. And I had a genuine surprise when he appeared on my doorstep in 1977 — six years after his runaway. I still had his runaway note and read it to him. He smiled. Then he proceeded to tell me how he had been making his way in life, working as an artisan. He exuded an air of confidence and accomplishment. We exchanged a few memories and then he left. It was as though he felt a duty to check in and report.

I liked Howard Hastings but I knew there was no way he could submit to the structure of a group home. He was one of those boys who had to do his own thing on the streets. I didn’t know too much about his background except the fact he had been institutionalized most of his life. But I did gain some insight into his situation when I took him to see his parents shortly after he arrived at the Home in 1970.

I had arranged for Howard’s home visit with his step-mother. The purpose of the visit was not to exchange any affection or even keep in touch. He simply wanted to pick up a few possessions — a sleeping bag and a guitar.

It was over a hundred miles to his home and we arrived somewhat tired and hungry. We arrived later than we had arranged. I rang the doorbell. Howard’s step-mother answered.

“Hi Mom.”

There was no response, just a cold stare which unmistakably said: “What are you doing here?”

“You were supposed to have been here an hour ago.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. We were a little late but we had been traveling for two and a half hours. I made due apologies.

“I'm really sorry. It wasn't Howard's fault.”

“Are you the priest?”

“Yes, mam.”

“Aren't priests supposed to keep their word?” The message was clear. She was out for a little knife-twisting.

There was a moment of cold silence. Finally I asked if we could enter the house. She allowed us to enter but reminded us that we were interfering with their dinner hour. I assured her we would be but a few minutes. She in turn sent Howard's brother and sister to another room so they could not as much as greet each other. Howard's father spoke:

“You need a haircut, son.”

“Yes, dad.”

“And I notice you have a new pair of boots. Are those for stomping?” I couldn't figure out why he had to make a negative comment about his boots, as though they were the gear of juvenile delinquents to go along with his long hair. (Actually Howard's hair was as long as Humphrey Bogart's when he played in *Casablanca*).

“Dad, can I have the sleeping bag?”

“No.”

That was about the extent of the interchange. He was allowed to take his guitar with him. Howard shook hands with his father and kissed his stepmother as we left. I was dumbfounded.

I thought about Howard Hasting's “home” visit and had some insight as to why he took to the streets.

The Cinderella Syndrome

It was one of those evenings when I wished Brother Oblivion would take over my shift. Most of the boys were home. Mark Tarryton was at his Senior Prom.

Mark (the inspiration of Mark's Law cf. ch. 4) had been with us three months. Though drug-oriented, he was a peaceful boy. His father being an FBI agent seemed to determine the quality of his rebellion — long hair and allegiance to hippiedom. But tonight he was to be part of the straight world — including the wearing of a tuxedo.

I had told Mark to be home at midnight, though I hadn't expected him to arrive on the dot. I was hoping he would be back before 2 am.

It must have been close to midnight when I began to doze. My reading consisted of the log noting the boys' behavior. Very boring. I really couldn't get interested in who made their bed or who didn't take his shower. It was at that twilight moment when the unconscious dream world begins to take over that I heard the unmistakable sound of the vacuum cleaner. I awoke somewhat startled — not because of the noise, but from a sense of incongruity. No one had ever done any spontaneous housecleaning. And the midnight hour made it even more strange.

Sammy Ortiz was vacuuming the living room rug.

"He must be trying to destroy some evidence" I thought to myself. And I naturally assumed some kind of drug. Marijuana? No that couldn't be. Sammy would have saved any spilled contraband.

"What's going on, Ortiz?" I noticed some splinters of glass on the floor. The boys didn't have to feel ashamed if they had an accident. I had grown accustomed to the fragility of the world of artifacts. And I had long since grown accustomed to the number one phenomenon of boys' home life: the broken window.

"Don't worry, Old Man. I'm just doing some chores,"

Sam assured me. The drapes were pulled. I didn't see the broken window at the time.

"Mark's home." Ortiz volunteered the information.

I went to his room. He was sitting on the edge of his bed with a wine bottle in his hand. It was empty. I recognized it as a bottle he simply had as an ornament in his room. He had no smell of liquor on his breath. But his eyes had an expressionless distant stare.

"Have a nice time at the Prom, Mark?" I was trying to be conversational. Obviously he hadn't. No answer.

"What's the matter, Mark? Did some of the Jocks hassle you?" Mark's world was a battlefield with the "Jocks" (athletic, straight types) pitted against the "Heads" (the drug-users, the burnt-outs).

Mark managed to get out a word. "Yes."

"That's too bad." I was aware he was on some drug. But I was a novice in these situations. I went to the man who knew, the only one who could give me advice: Ortiz. What I did know was the fact there was some link between the stare of Mark's eyes and the splintered glass sucked up by the midnight vacuumer.

"Ortiz, what's going on with Tarryton?" (I always used last names when I was serious).

"He's on acid."

"Why the broken glass?"

"You told him to be home at midnight. He came home a little late and found the door locked. So he punched in the window to open the door."

Thus it was that I learned the degree of paranoia associated with LSD. Mark must have really imagined that he would have turned into a pumpkin had he not been in by midnight.

With my newly discovered knowledge I asked Mark if he wished to go to the hospital. He nodded "yes". We went out to my car. I opened the door for him. He suspected a trick. He refused to get in. I persuaded him that the trip was purely voluntary — that he didn't have to go, but that it would be good for him. He got in the car. I was becoming a psychologist.

On the way to the hospital Mark asked me a question.
“What is it like to be dead?”

“I don’t know, Mark.”

“Are you God?”

“No, Mark, I’m not God.” (I had overcome the temptation. Perhaps I was becoming a theologian as well as a psychologist).

Mark went peacefully to the hospital emergency room. I waited with him. He was calm...until the doctor came into the room smoking a cigarette. Mark’s passive glassy stare turned into animal anger.

“Can’t you see the sign? No Smoking. Are you trying to get us killed?”

After scolding the doctor, Mark bolted from the room. I followed him down the hallway and persuaded him to come back. The doctor had meanwhile put out his cigarette. (There was a No Smoking sign next to the oxygen tank in the emergency room).

There followed the usual battery of questions about what he had taken into his system. Then Mark was released to me.

It was 4 am when we returned from the hospital. Mark ate a banana with the pill the doctor had given him. And he lay on his bed still dressed in his tuxedo, his music playing softly and his black light casting a purple glow on his starched shirt. I thought to myself: “Am I part of a fairy tale?”

I went to bed wondering if a servant of the King would be by in the morning with a glass slipper for all of us to try on for size.

Playing Cops and Robbers

“Put your hands up and face that wall. Move! Now!”

“Must be one of the boys imitating Kojak or Starsky and Hutch”, I thought to myself. But the words were repeated with unusual authority. I looked up and had the same feeling Little Red Riding Hood experienced when she discovered “grandmother” was really the wolf. It wasn’t Halloween. Real uniformed sheriffs were surrounding the Home as we exited the front door.

Steve, one of the boys, was with me and the remaining five were in the van waiting for us. It was activity night and we were on our way to see the latest cops and robbers movie. The two of us quickly put our hands up and faced the wall of the house. There was a brief silence. Steve started to say something. I cautioned him to stay quiet. I didn’t like loaded guns. The papers had recently printed the story of a youngster who ran from the police and was shot. I could picture Steve getting paranoid, running and ... who knows what. I could picture the five boys in the van getting into the action, each in his own way. There was MJL, a 15 year-old who everytime he saw a sheriff had to imitate the sound of a pig or make a comment like “I smell bacon.” There was TAJ who once told a sheriff: “I don’t have to do what you tell me” when asked to move from a gathering of youngsters. He disliked all police because they were the ones who removed him from his home. And then there was Bruce, a 13 year-old whose most recent act was to let the air out of a teacher’s tires while invited at her home for dinner.

My imagination ran wild. I pictured a giant confrontation with name calling, shin-kicking, shooting... My day-dreaming ceased. With my head resting against the redwood shingles of the house I volunteered some information.

“I’m a Catholic priest. This is a boys’ home.”

With that utterance the sheriff allowed us to drop our hands and turn around. He briefly explained that he thought our house was in the process of being burglarized. I thanked him for his concern. But I never fully understood the situation. Were the sheriffs getting field instruction? Was there a case of mistaken identity? Had one of the boys placed a phone call indicating burglary? Did our house car resemble the getaway car of another burglary? All these questions were to remain unanswered.

The sheriffs left as quietly as they came. And I wondered if the words: "I'm a Catholic priest" would have the same magic for a real burglar.

9

Spare Cigarettes

“**T**his is my last pack. I'm quitting for good.”

These were the words of Mike Cardonel as he stuffed five cigarettes in his mouth and smoked them simultaneously. The other boys in the car begged him to share his last pack, but he had a flare for the dramatic that took precedence over charity.

When the holocaust was over Cardonel turned to me:

“Now will you buy me that drum set? I've quit for good.”

I smiled. While I promised rewards for boys who would quit, there had to be a substantial time interval to prove good intentions. Cardonel interpreted my smile to mean “no.” A half hour later he was begging cigarettes from the other boys. Since he had no luck begging, he traded a \$5. belt for a cigarette.

Cardonel actually had trouble with cancer sticks from

his very first days in our Home. He had not been with us a week when I had to bail him out of juvenile hall because the local supermarket had called the sheriff when he stole a pack of Marlboros.

He was so hard-up for cigarettes that on his court date he asked the judge for an "extra cigarette." And he got it.

Rod Hodges on the other hand, had a problem with cars as well as cigarettes. One day he stopped by a friend's house after school. And he noticed that a neighbor of his friend had left the keys in the ignition of his car. So he accepted the "invitation."

He and his friend had a good time that afternoon cruising around town. And when they ran out of gas they left the car and thumbed a ride home.

The next day Rod again went to his friend's home. He couldn't believe his eyes. The neighbor had recovered the car. (I say "the" car because by now he considered it some kind of community property). In his heart he was thankful that the owner returned it and had it gassed up for another afternoon of fun. Who needed Disneyland when these kinds of opportunities were available?

Rod, of course, had "his" key from the previous day. But as he got into the driver's seat, the hot hand of the owner was on his shoulder where it stayed until the sheriffs arrived.

Rod cooperated with the owner and the sheriffs. And when he was asked his address he managed to get out his hardluck story about being rejected by his parents and having to live in a boys' home. After hearing his story complete with pleas for mercy, the owner did not press charges. The hardluck kid and his victim shook hands and parted. But before he left, he had one request:

"Say, do you have a spare cigarette?"

10

Exor-System

Vince Planter was not possessed. But he was obsessed with my inadequacies in formulating a behavioral system of rewards and punishments.

"The point system has got to go," he shouted at the group meeting of staff and boys. He felt power with his rallying cry. He hated this system which would curtail his allowance and privileges.

"Let's talk about it, Vince." I felt the system was in the best interest of the boys. It lessened the arbitrary nature of decisions about allowances and privileges. It encouraged good daily living habits. So on Fridays instead of merely telling a boy he had no privileges for poor behavior during the week, I could point to ten categories: 1) care of room 2) personal hygiene 3) attending meals 4) smoking rules 5) daily job 6) courtesy 7) school attendance 8) punctuality 9) bedtime rules 10) misc. hassles. Generally three to five points were taken off for each offense and a boy could lose up to twenty points without losing privileges. But today Vince Planter had earned zero level for spitting in the food, spitting at a teacher and not doing his daily job. "Spitting" constituted a major incident and automatically reduced him to zero status.

"The point system has got to go." Vince was not interested in discussion. At this point he was only interested in followers and a little house revolution. But being at the bottom of the pecking order of 6 boys, Vince had little persuasion with the others.

My intuition told me that reason would not prevail with Planter. He had a kind of blood lust revenge attitude towards this "system" which was out to harm him. Since I didn't want Planter's negativism to destroy the harmony of the group, I employed a strategem with the techniques of primitive theologies.

"Bring me the copy of the point system from the

bulletin board, would you Vince?" He obliged and crumpled the paper enough to show his anger. I then ignited the edges of the paper and uttered an incantation:

"Evil spirits on this page
Who enkindle Planter's rage:
May this fire spell your doom.
Depart at once from this room!"

Vince had no sense of humor. He was not impressed.

"You're just trying to use psychology on me. I'm wise to what your scheme is. But it won't work."

At this point another boy, Pat Bertall poured salt and pepper on the scorched point system sheets. Yet even after this display of overkill, Planter was not appeased. But at least he had given us the occasion to have some fun at a group meeting that he wanted to control by his call-to-arms.

As evening fell and the dust settled, the embattled point system chart held her own on the bulletin board. And I had a vision of Old Glory on Guadalcanal.

11

Trophy Collector

It was just a few days before Vince Planter's 18th birthday which would not only inaugurate legal adulthood but would be the day of his legal emancipation from the Home. And remaining true to his contentious style, he ran away from the Home three days before the magic hour. He realized his probation officer would not do anything about his runaway since he was so close to his official time of release. While I understood Planter's final gesture to be a symbol of his need to have power over me and the "system", I nonetheless had to file a missing person's report. And a deputy sheriff, as though he had nothing else to do, had to spend a half hour with me going over the necessary paper work involved in such a report.

As I gave the sheriff the information — height, weight, distinguishing marks, place of departure, clothes worn, etc., the skies darkened. As he left the home after his routine investigation at taxpayer's expense, the skies let loose the heaviest rainfall of the '73 season.

A half hour later the same sheriff who took the report knocked on my door. Had he found Planter so quickly? And if he did find him, what was I going to do with him if he was unwilling to stay the few days before his birthday?

"Come on in, officer. Did you leave something behind?" My question proved not to be so funny.

"I would like to have my license plate and gas cap back." He registered no humor on his face. I took a deep breath realizing that theft from a sheriff's patrol car, especially a license plate was probably a felony. And something told me that a license plate would not drop off accidentally while in our driveway. I thought for a moment. Who would do such a dumb thing? It had to be my number one showoff — Grisby. He loved to tell stories about all his adventures with the cops. My intuition was right. I found the plate in his room.

Grisby lost his allowance along with “his” trophy. But most importantly he lost his coveted stereotype of cops as “pigs.” The officer didn’t press charges.

12

A Question of Blood Money

As I was jogging through our neighborhood one morning, I saw several handwritten signs posted on telephone poles. They read: \$100 REWARD. LOST: a large orange and white neutered male cat. Answers to name of Bobbylee. Needs medication. Please help. Reward will be paid for any information leading to whereabouts of our cat. This is our second cat missing in two months. Call 481-2510.”

The following week new signs appeared where the old ones had been. The message was the same, but the reward was increased to \$500. And there was clearly stated the same condition: “any information, etc.”

I hadn’t given Bobbylee a second thought the day I climbed the roof of our house to do some repairs. And I was just about finished with my work when something caught my eye in the tall trees a few yards away. The trees were pine, but what I saw didn’t appear to be a cone. I wiped the dust from my glasses and got a better look. It was orange and white. “Must be a squirrel,” I thought. But the squirrels in our neighborhood were grey. Then I recalled the sign. I called out: “Bobbylee”. There was no answer. I called out again and again. There was not even a meow.

Still uncertain as to what the orange and white thing in the tree was, I called to one of the boys on the ground below.

“Grisby, climb that tree a little way and see what that thing is.”

He didn't need to climb the tree. He could see very clearly.

"That's the cat with the reward. I'm rich."

"Just hold on, Grisby. We're not going to take any reward for a dead cat."

"But the sign didn't say anything about dead or alive."

At this point one of Grisby's peers, Roger, intervened. "That does look like the cat on the Reward signs. I'll go call the lady. But I don't think we should take any reward. That would be blood money."

Then there issued a controversy among all the boys as to what constituted 'blood money'. And while the boys were arguing I was having serious second thoughts about the prudence of Roger contacting the lady. Perhaps we should just take the cat down and bury it without notifying the possible owner. But while I was thinking, Roger made the call and summoned the cat's mistress. Within a few minutes he came back with a woman dressed in black and apparently in a state of mourning. She identified the cat and burst into tears.

Since we in the Home had had so little communication with our neighbors, I did not recognize the woman though she lived but a few doors away. All of our boys were courteous — for motives known only to themselves. Grisby climbed the tree and pruned loose the now bloated body. Roger got a plastic bag from the kitchen. The boys offered to bury Bobbylee (and I'm sure they would have offered my services for a funeral had they thought it appropriate).

After the woman left, the topic of conversation went again to the problem of "blood money" and whether a reward could be collected when "dead or alive" wasn't specified. Roger maintained his position of higher ethics. Grisby began counting all the things he could buy with the \$500.

The moral dilemma was solved very swiftly. There was no reward offered.

My Great Escape

Country Club is a shopping center in Sacramento consisting of a bowling alley, a record store, a few shops catering to teenagers' money. The boys in our home liked to browse in the record store, check out the posters and all the marijuana pipes and paraphernalia. The more delinquent teenagers liked this shopping center because it was a known place for drug connections.

I made this shopping center "out-of-bounds" for our Home after an experience I had in 1972. I wore a beard that year. And for some people I appeared to be more trustworthy because of it. On one particular evening I must have appeared trustworthy in the bloodshot eyes of two strangers.

I was sitting in my car in the Country Club parking lot waiting for two of my boys who were browsing in the record store when two nondescript men pulled alongside of me in their 1967 Ford Falcon.

"Hey, you know where we can get some weed?"

Their eyes didn't focus. Whatever they were on, they had had too much. I answered them with sarcasm.

"You might ask the sheriff for some."

There was a moment's pause. My answer didn't register.

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'try the sheriff. Sheriff Duane Lowe. His men pick up a lot of marijuana. He might give you some'."

The sarcasm registered. Their eyes began to focus. They opened the doors of their car with that unmistakable facial expression that meant bodily harm to me. I made a quick prayer that my car would start. It did. I raced out of the parking lot on to the busy boulevard. The two were right behind me. The chase lasted for a mile and a half. For the first time in my life I wished for a highway patrolman to stop me. No such luck. I quickly turned around and

headed in the opposite direction. I lost them. My years of watching T.V. police action had paid off.

But now I had to return to the scene of the original encounter. I still had two boys in the record store waiting for me. Being not one for heroics, I parked a distance from the store and waited for a while. When the coast was clear of '67 Falcons and non-focusing eyes, I retrieved the boys.

They didn't believe my story. And to this day I feel like Walter Mitty when I write about it.

14

Angry Ever Since

“It’s a bird; it’s a plane; it’s Hainsworth!”

Kevin Hainsworth, age 14, rode his bicycle off the roof of our house, a fall of 10 feet. I couldn't believe it. He escaped uninjured. He had the reputation of being a maniac and was happy with himself...on appearances only. Deep down he was a volcano of anger.

When the court placed Kevin with us he was in the 8th grade. He quickly went through two of our district schools. They couldn't cope with his drug problem and life style. And so when a California Highway Patrolman caught him smoking pot on a school ground, the school district decided to “kick him upstairs”. By promoting him to the 9th grade without having gained merit for the 8th, the school district was putting him in his social element. He got no certificate for his promotion.

Kevin adapted to high school very quickly. Somehow he managed to develop a habit of drinking alcohol in coke cans while on school grounds. He thought himself a kind of superman when it came to liquor. He felt he could outdrink

the ocean. But his habit caught up with him. This is how it happened.

I was talking to our next door neighbor, assuring her that our boys wouldn't cause any trouble when I saw Grisby dragging Hainesworth across the street. I rushed over to Grisby. I looked at Hainsworth and gasped: "My God, he's been shooting up!" I saw puffy skin and immediately thought of the "bad stuff" that killed many a heroin addict.

We got Kevin to a hospital, put him in a wheel chair and turned him over to emergency. The doctor on duty was quick to inform me that he was simply drunk. Distracted by the condition of his skin, I failed to smell his breath. And then I remembered the story he told me — how his brother had once poured lye on him causing severe burns, how angry he was that his father had not punished his brother. Now I knew why I had never seen Kevin without a shirt — even when he went swimming.

I'm never sure about definitions. I don't know if Kevin could be defined an alcoholic. But for whatever reason, he continued to drink hard liquor both in and out of school. I judged him to be beyond our Home's ability to control and referred him back to the custody of his county.

After Kevin left us for a more secure environment, I found an essay he had written at my request. I had asked him to put his memories of childhood on paper. He wrote:

"When I was small I had a best friend. He lived next door. I called him 'Baby Johnny'. We went to kindergarten together. My mom and dad were good friends with his mom and dad. I could remember when my dad took us to all kinds of places. We had all kinds of fun. We used to eat at his house and he used to eat at our house. And our moms took us shopping and bought us cowboy and Indian suits. I had a cap gun. I still have a picture of us in our suits. One day we put sand and rocks in Johnny's father's gas tank because we thought the car was hungry. We got spanked for it. My mom and dad were arguing all the time. I hated that. And one day when I was playing with Johnny my dad called me in. My mom was gone. And my dad said: 'guess

where your mom has gone?' I said: 'Where?' And he said: 'To get a divorce.' I knew why. They always argued.

"I went to my quiet spot. It was on the roof next to the chimney. From there I could see all of San Francisco and the Bay. After a while I went to court and had to live with my dad...and had to move away from my friend and my good memories,,, and I've been angry ever since...."

15

Biting the Hand

My staff on duty, Bruce Wells, phoned me urgently: "Rick Moreland and Ron have been in a fight. I think Moreland has been cut. He's holding his back and there's blood on his shirt. I've got a hold of him for now but you better get here quick."

I had grown so used to emergency situations that I rather perfunctorily put on my shoes and drove to the scene. I was but a few minutes away. When I arrived I saw Wells holding Moreland who was doubled over, holding his back where he was apparently wounded with the knife. I didn't see the cut on Moreland, only the one on Wells' hand. But since time was the essence, I simply asked Moreland if he was cut. He answered "yes", and I raced him to the hospital. Wells phoned ahead. And an orderly met us with a gurney as we pulled up to the entrance.

Moreland was rushed in. A nurse removed his shirt. There was no cut on his back. They turned him over. There was no cut anywhere. There weren't even scratches. I was puzzled. Then puzzlement turned to anger as though I was disappointed that he wasn't hurt.

I phoned Wells.

“Who had the knife? Moreland isn’t even cut. I felt stupid when they didn’t even find a scratch on him. And who started the fight?”

Wells informed me that Moreland started the fight and the others said that he had the knife. That’s all I wanted to know. I called the sheriffs. Two officers arrived. I tried as best I could to explain the situation to them. But they didn’t seem to react. One officer gave me his philosophy of man, namely there were some people who just were hopeless and really not worth the effort. I asked them if they would take Moreland into juvenile hall on a Beyond Control Petition.

“We could,” they informed me. But I got the hint that they weren’t too interested in this rather odd case where the real victim, Bruce Wells, was on duty at the boy’s home and the attacker was in the hospital feigning an injury.

While I was talking to the sheriffs the orderly had taken Moreland to X-Ray. And in a half hour’s time he was released to me with no apparent injury.

While driving I announced to Moreland his fate. I was taking him to juvenile hall as a placement failure for having used a knife in a fight, injuring a staff and himself feigning an injury. He didn’t like my idea and ran from the car as soon as we pulled up to a stop sign. I didn’t bother following him, since I wasn’t in the mood for hopping fences. I went back to the Home.

A few minutes later the Hospital called. It was the orderly who had attended to Moreland.

“This is embarrassing, but I’m missing my wristwatch. Do you think your boy may by mistake have....”

“It was no mistake. He stole it. I’ll try and get it back.” I hung up. Anger was my emotion. I called the sheriffs. And within minutes they had Moreland in their custody. A search revealed he had the orderly’s watch along with some illegal drugs. This time the sheriffs escorted Moreland to juvenile hall. They had the advantage of patrolcar doors which couldn’t be opened from the inside.

With smiles from the hospital staff, the orderly got back his wristwatch. And a not-too-happy probation officer got back Moreland.

16

I Love Trouble?

“**T**his kid is impossible. I would like to tell you to take him home and break every bone in his body.”

These were the words of a prominent psychiatrist who had just conducted a 15 minute interview with one of the boys from our Home, Chris Martin, age 16. Knowing that the psychiatrist was the son of a rabbi, I understood his advice as biblical metaphor. But I had a gut feeling for what he experienced in the interview — the sneer, the four-letter Word with its various combinations. I knew how negative Martin was towards authority figures and psychiatrists in particular. But I was told by the court he needed psychiatric help. And the psychiatrist told me he really needed a few days in boot camp with a mean Marine sergeant.

Chris stayed with us for 18 months before pressuring his mother to take him back. His career with us was at best marginal. While he did attend school, he had the usual problems with authority, drugs and psychiatrists. When he went back to his mother he added the problem of “cars”. He took hers out one day and smashed it thoroughly, thus finding himself back in juvenile hall.

It was while he was in the sullen atmosphere of lockup that his probation officer came to him with a deal.

“How bad do you want to get out of here?”

“I’ll do anything.”

“Join the Army?” Chris pondered the condition for a moment. He ran his hands through his shoulder-length hair.

“I guess I’ll have to get a haircut.”

“Don’t worry about that. They’ll give you one.”

Chris made the deal. And thirteen months later he paid me a visit. I had to look twice. The uniform. The short hair. The appearance of physical well-being. He told me of his year’s duty in Korea, the money he had saved, the car he owned.

“Chris,” I said. “I never thought you would make it in the Army. You had such a hard time making it in the Home.”

“The Army’s easier than the Home,” he replied philosophically. And he was obviously proud of himself.

“There were no sergeants who threatened to break you in half?”

“I’m telling you the Army is easy.”

While I felt a certain pride in Chris, I wondered if he really could make it in the Army. Would they trust him behind the wheel? Was he stable enough for the responsibility of defending the lives of others?

I saw Chris again after he did his three years in the Army. He had a job, would you guess, driving a truck. He still had his short hair and by his admission was leading a straight life. I reminded him of the time I took him semi-conscious to the hospital after he overdosed on a mixture of vodka and pills a neighborhood girl had generously given him.

“I haven’t got loaded in the past three years,” he assured me with the cool detachment of an adult who successfully passed through adolescence.

“Chris, that’s great. But why didn’t you figure out things while you were living here. You could have saved us both a lot of trouble.”

His reply stuck with me. “Father, you wouldn’t be in this kind of work if you didn’t love trouble.”

17

Home Brew

“Are you sure we can get away with it?” asked Curtis somewhat hesitantly.

“Are you dumb? The old man is in his room reading. And we’re supposed to be asleep. It’s only going to take a few minutes. Just follow me. Do you have a knife?” Steve was the leader.

“OK. But if we get caught”

The two set out at midnight and were back within ten minutes. They had gone to the edge of our property and cut all the grapes on a vine. And with the grapes safely stowed away in a shed, they retired for the evening.

The next day they crushed the grapes and followed the instructions of a little booklet on the art of winemaking.

I wasn’t aware of the boys’ grand winemaking scheme until I made a roomcheck after the harvest festival. The bottles were hardly camouflaged by socks and underwear. I opened one. It about knocked me out. I hesitated. Should I just pretend I didn’t see it and let nature take its course. I followed my puritanical instincts and poured the contents into the ground. I was ecology minded.

I suffered some remorse for throwing away that home brew. The tinge of conscience was not over waste or invasion of privacy. Rather I had lost an opportunity to practice reality therapy. If only I had allowed the boys to drink and get sick on their own creation, they would have been cured of trying a cheap drunk. But then again I wouldn’t have wanted them to think I was that careless about what they had in their rooms.

Torn Shirt Therapy

Frank Mather was put on probation at 16 for check forgery. He had intelligence and a love for the things money could buy. He avoided work like a contagious disease. And he lived in a closed world, angry at the fact both of his parents had died and left him to face the struggle alone.

It was with Mather that I first used a psychological technique I was to later call: "Tornshirt Therapy." Since this form of therapy is not explained in most textbooks on adolescence, I shall attempt to describe it by example.

The year was 1974. Mather decided he wanted the Home's petty cash. So he kicked in the staff room door and stole \$70. He was not caught redhanded in the act. But all circumstantial evidence pointed to him. I was convinced it was him from the footprint on the door to the guiltprint on his face. Yet he denied my accusation. And evidence did little to alter his position. Thus I was left with only one alternative. I handed the matter over to his probation officer. He was taken to juvenile hall, where it was hopeful that lockup and confinement might help him to cultivate the virtue of honesty. I didn't press charges of theft. I simply considered Mather a placement failure until such time as he decided to confess.

Mather didn't like juvenile hall. And when I visited him after a week of confinement I asked him if he wanted to return home. He assured me he did. I laid out my condition for his release.

"All you have to do, Frank, is confess to what you did. Are you still denying you did it? I know you had money. You were buying all kinds of snacks and you had no allowance."

"I admit I had money. But a friend sent it to me."

"What's his name? Let me call him. If I can verify by phone that a friend sent you the money you had, I'll believe you." I felt I had called his bluff.

“I can’t give you my friend’s name.”

“But Frank, I can keep it with the professional secrecy of a priest.”

“No! Me and my friends made an agreement that we would never give out information on each other.”

“Ok, Frank. Have it your way. I’ll be back in a half hour. If you are willing to confess, I’ll take you out of here. If you continue to play games, you can stay here forever.”

I returned in a half hour. He was quick to change his tone.

“I confess. I took the money. But I don’t have any of it left.”

Being somewhat satisfied that Frank confessed, I didn’t press him on what he did with the money. I would have time later to find out. I took him home with me just on the basis that he told part of the truth.

In the days following his release from detention, we watched Frank closely. And one of the first things he did was walk to a record store and make a \$5 purchase. When I saw him with the records I confronted him as to where he got the money since by his confession he didn’t have any of the stolen money left. His answer was memorable.

“On my way home from school I was passing through a school yard and saw this little kid being hassled by some older kids. I helped the little kid get out of the trouble he was in. And to thank me he gave me \$5.”

After listening to this tale, I didn’t give Frank the courtesy of further questioning. I was tired and impatient. I was worn out by his games. So I did the unprofessional thing of grabbing his tee shirt by the neck and twisting it until it tore. My face was now an inch away from his and I yelled with conviction: “I want all of the money now or I’ll push you through a wall.”

These were strange words for a priest. But they bore results. He went to his room and produced \$60. The case was closed. Torn Shirt Therapy won the day.

But did my TS Therapy produce lasting results in Mather? The answer is an unequivocal “no.” Force only has a temporary effect. When Frank left our home, he fell

apart. He was one of those individuals who needed a lifetime top sergeant in order to function in society.

19

The Case of the Broken Crutch

The six were antsy. It was Saturday night. They weren't satisfied with having gone to a movie. So when I took my eyes off them for a few minutes they disappeared. I felt certain they weren't kidnapped. I was angry. I planned my revenge.

After a half hour one of the six returned. Anger turned to puzzlement.

"Where have you been, Jim?"

"Just down to the store." He looked past me as he spoke and offered no information about the others.

A few minutes later Steve and Bruce returned. I reminded them I wasn't happy about them leaving without permission. I told them they would be restricted. They offered no argument. They were polite. They went to their rooms silently as though they had seen a ghost.

I knew I was in the middle of a giant puzzle until I saw Gerard. He came limping home with a broken crutch. He had left without his artificial leg and explained the broken crutch.

"I was running along with my crutches. You've seen me run before. There was a rock in the street I didn't see. My crutch flew out and got run over by a car. If you want me to pay for new ones, I'll"

I interrupted Gerard. "What really happened?"

The pressure was too much. The youngster told the true story. The boys had got a call from one of the girls in the neighborhood. She offered to take them for a ride in her pickup truck. She had been drinking and as a result she did some fishtailing down the main street with all the boys in the back. She overturned the truck and the boys scrambled in different directions to avoid the ultimate evil in their eyes: my knowing of what happened.

The reality of the situation was beginning to dawn on me. My staff and I checked for injuries. Bruce was concerned about Steve who looked in serious shape. We called an ambulance for him. And when Kirc and Cardonel straggled in, we took a trip to the hospital. After 3 hours of exams and x rays we had a verdict. Steve had a concussion, Kirc a bruised elbow, Cardonel a broken kneecap. The others merely had scratches.

And me? I suffered a personality change. I began to read Macciavelli and therewith espoused a political philosophy of the benevolent dictator. As a result of that incident, it became a serious crime in our home to ride with unauthorized drivers.

20

On the Many Uses of a Commode

It was a Saturday evening when everything was a little more quiet than usual. Four of the boys were at a movie and the usually obstreperous duo, Walden Hash and Jerry Moon had locked themselves in the bathroom.

Norris, my night staff, came to me in somewhat of a panic.

"Hash and Moon are in the bathroom, up to no good. They won't open the door to me. When I looked through the window they were both standing at the sink. I couldn't tell exactly what they were doing but I think Walden is shooting up."

Norris and I conferred for a brief minute to plan our strategy. If the boys were in fact shooting up drugs we had to be extremely careful not to give them the opportunity to run.

"I'll take the window and you take the door." My instructions sounded like lines from the T.V. show, "S.W.A.T."

When I got to the window I could see clearly that the boys were not shooting up. Neither were they innocently brushing their teeth. The motion of their hands which caused the exposure of forearms was not the act of injecting a needle. They were rolling marijuana cigarettes.

"Ok, you guys. You're busted, just open the door and let Norris in."

Moon looked at the door, then looked at the window. He hesitated for a moment as though pondering an escape route. He opened up and submitted to the inevitable.

I turned the bathroom into a courtroom. Norris was appointed bailiff. I was judge and jury. The verdict was reached instantaneously. The two were sentenced to a month of restriction with a warning that the next offense would be turned over to law enforcement and termination of placement would follow.

The rest of the sentence was carried out when the other boys returned home. Just as in ancient days when an execution was made a spectator sport, I decided to have everyone become part of the last act of the evening's drama. Like the hangman who pulls the lever which releases the opening in the platform holding the man-to-be-hanged, I released the lever of the toilet and threw in the thirty joints rolled by Walden and Jerry. There was no applause, just the murmur: "What a waste!"

21

A Moment of Power

Timmy was 13 but that was only part of his problem. He embodied everything I had heard about anger and hyperactivity. He was with us for three months before I had to terminate him from our program. In my letter of explanation to his county placement worker, I listed a few reasons why we couldn't handle him.

"Timmy's behavior has been characterized by explosiveness, stealing and poor peer relationships. Yesterday he broke a drinking glass over another boy's head. There was no injury to the other boy. But he, in turn, had to be restrained from attacking Timmy. Last week he attempted to hit a counselor over the head with an axe handle. And today he managed to hit one of the women staff in the face with a book. Needless to say, he isn't making friends. If for no other reason at least for his own safety he needs immediate removal from our program."

Timmy was placed with us after a short stay in a psychiatric hospital where reports indicated he was beyond their control. He was too disruptive, despite efforts to medicate him. He was beyond our ability to control also. In terminating him from our program I suggested he be placed in juvenile hall as beyond control. (In 1975 it was still possible to offer this kind of help to the wild ones). But it was his county's policy to shelter 13 yearolds from lockup discipline. In general the policy was good. But in Timmy's case I felt his cage could stand a good rattling. His theft and aggressive behavior would eventually need some kind of intervention from a lock-up system. And if he was to be sheltered from probation's normal course of juvenile hall, he would be sent to a State Hospital.

The most memorable event in Timmy's stay with us happened one morning after he had gone through one of his ordinary beyond-control maneuvers — running through the house poking other boys. My house parent at the time was

a gentle but firm person who believed in direct behavior modification. He took Timmy by the arm and began a forced march down the street. The idea of the walk was twofold: to get him out of the immediate area of combat with the other boys and to give him a chance to cool off. Timmy was not happy with the tactic. And as the two walked down the neighborhood street, the youngster tried to wriggle away. A neighbor, thinking it was child abuse, called the sheriff. The patrolmen put my hired houseparent in their security car.

When I arrived at the Home I found my staff, a 35 yearold man, prisoner of the sheriff while Timmy stood outside the car explaining things to the officers. I can imagine what he told them — the history of his separation from his parents, the trauma of living in a boys' home, the brutality of staff, etc.

I gave the officers a more complete picture. The prisoner was released. Timmy's moment of glory was short-lived.

22

Kite-Flying as a Life Model

It was a classic day for kite-flying, one of those Fall days with just enough breeze. I set out with two kites and a 14 yearold named Kirc. We had plenty of room to fly our kites separately — an acre of land and good distance from power lines.

Being traditional, I ran against the wind to get my kite airborne. But Kirc wouldn't follow my example or advice. He kept getting tailspins. Suddenly he got an idea. He tailspinned his kite onto my line thus bringing both kites to

destructive entanglement. And when he accomplished downing mine on a power line, his face lit into a bright smile.

That scene was rather symbolic of Kirc's life. He was never a bad kid, but his life seemed to be somewhat programmed towards entanglement and disorder. He came to us as beyond control of his mother. And after a year with us, when pressures on his mother to return to her were of no avail, he ran away. Fortune dictated that he be picked up by some Christian hippies on their way to a commune in Oregon. The young runaway now had a means of survival. He allowed himself to be programmed into Christianity, a modern day rice-Christian. After a month on the commune, he returned to the Home. With the pack on his back, he added the possession of several phrases from the New Testament. And while his Jewish mother was happy to see him back, she wondered about his "Christianity."

Kirc's mother did take him back home. He had won his round with her, just as he was victorious in downing my kite. But he soon forgot his passages from Scripture and went to his old beyond-control ways. He found himself at the boys' ranch serving time.

When Kirc turned 18 he took to the road, but hardly a hitchhiker for Christ. He did some stealing and soon found himself in an out-of-state penitentiary. He wrote me often from jail. In one letter he asked me to read something to the boys of the home:

"It's no fun in here. You have it good where you are."

Kirc promises that he will never steal again. Only time will tell if his prophesy for himself will come true. I've personally come to the conclusion that theft, like alcoholism, is a sickness. And the cure isn't a vague promise not to do it again.

Kirc's problems didn't begin in his teen years. At the age of 5 he set fire to a closet in his home after being spanked by a babysitter. His early school reports indicate him as a beyond control and aggressive child. Three years in a special home for disturbed children resulted in these words of termination:

“Our overall picture of Kirc is that he is uncontrollable. We cannot offer him the controls he needs. We have discussed his case with a more therapeutic institution which can offer him more controls . . .”

Kirc went to that institution and another and another. There was no “therapeutic magic” for him. And so we ask: who was at fault? Was it his mother? She gave him up for adoption as a baby in a loving gesture because she did not feel adequate to raise him. Was it his adoptive mother? She did her best to love and control him.

In the last analysis, it comes down to individual responsibility. Kirc may have gotten to where he is by external forces he couldn’t control. But if he returns to the slammer, I have to say, he is to blame. When it is time for Kirc to walk away from that prison after having served his time, he will have the choice of steering his life like a kite — away from the high tension lines that will entangle him.

Fly right, Kirc. This chapter is for you.

23

The Psychiatric Tatoo

Al was one of the nicest boys we’ve had in our Home. He never caused me a bit of trouble. He was one of those boy-home dream kids who just come along once in a while. Nothing really got him angry except mention of the agency that was responsible for the decision of placing him in a State psychiatric hospital for seven months.

Al’s mother died when he was two. He was adopted by an aunt. At the age of 15 he asked out of the aunt’s home because of her excessive punitive measures. Then a series of foster homes failed to suit his needs. And the records

show they were truly inappropriate placements. He appeared to be a placement problem. A psychiatrist was called in. His diagnosis was "adjustment reaction of childhood." Al was in a state of turmoil over his mother's death, his Father's lack of concern and instability, his aunt's repressive measures, the inappropriate foster placement offered him, etc. The psychiatrist concluded that the boy didn't need psychotherapy but only a nice home where he could relate to a solid male figure.

He was placed in a group home and did all right for a few months. Then one day he got into a fight with a counsellor at the home and he was sent to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation. In a matter of a few days he was given a new diagnosis. The boy who one psychiatrist saw as simply having an adjustment to the terrible trauma of losing his parents was now stigmatized as having a paranoid psychosis because he got into a fight with an authority figure. From the psychiatric hospital he was committed to the State Hospital. And in his new environment he was given a new diagnosis: latent schizophrenia.

Fortunately there is a State Public Defender. The hospital staff did their duty in informing him of his right to call on him for help. The Public Defender in turn called on me, and I decided to take Al. Not only did the boy work out in our setting, he was a positive contribution to the Home. And I could only conclude that the first psychiatrist was the one who really was on target with a diagnosis. The other two failed to realize that certain environments, like that of psychiatric wards, can evoke aggressive behavior.

I reflected on Al's case and wondered how the same three psychiatrists would have diagnosed me during one of my tantrums. For example, the night I walked into the Home and my staff told me the boys had been disorderly. I took a pool cue, broke it in half, and threw it on the ground. The boys stood agast and silent as I ranted and raged over their misbehavior.

The first psychiatrist might have said: "Father Cas is obviously having an adjustment reaction of parenthood. He is experiencing some normal anger with attendant loss of

impulse control. His thought process is coherent. And he may have broken the pool cue to make an impression on minds which cannot grasp abstractions.”

The second psychiatrist might have said: “The subject suffered a psychotic episode. The breakage of the pool cue symbolizes his break from reality. The subject’s fear of losing autocratic power leads to ritualistic destructiveness. Subject may be a danger to the community. Commitment is necessary.”

The third psychiatrist might have said: “This priest is a latent schizophrenic. As in the case with many religious people, he conceives himself as a prophet of God. His breaking of the pool cue was an attempt on the unconscious level to identify with Moses as he broke the Tablets of the Law when his people were not keeping the rules he had given them. Because his condition is not a full blown psychosis, it is safe for him to remain in the community as long as he has therapy.”

Take your pick.

24

Crying Wolf

It was a Friday night and the boys from the Home were all at a local, church-sponsored coffee house. There was music, dancing and the usual teenage socializing which included the guys who always smuggled in some liquor.

Leonard was there that night. Though only 14 he wanted to be one of the big kids. He had never indulged in any form of liquor before, but that night he managed to take more than a few swallows of Red Mountain wine, a libation dedicated to the god of nausea.

The coffee house called me about 10 pm.

"Leonard has passed out. What should we do?"

"Take him to the hospital. I'll meet you there."

When I arrived at the hospital, I found Leonard strapped to a gurney. There was a nurse standing over him, pinching him, trying to get some response. He remained motionless. He was apparently unconscious. I stood over him.

"Leonard, it's me, Father Cas."

A smile crossed his face. He held up his hand with the familiar peace sign and said, "Hi pop." He wasn't anywhere near drunk. He was practicing a role. But I gave him no award. I was angry that his 'cry wolf' had wasted everyone's time.

Then it happened! A few weeks later Leonard did make a cry and I didn't see the crisis. One evening after bedtime he sat up drawing a picture. It was in his words "an exploding planet" — himself. I ushered him to bed. The next day a barefooted "exploding planet" kicked in the windshield of my car. And his bleeding foot was testimony to the fact that he as a Black couldn't take the pressure of being in an all-White neighborhood.

We sent Leonard to another environment where he could deal with the pressures within himself and did not have to worry about racial stress.

25

The Adventures of Dr. I

He is a practitioner of gut reality, this Doctor I. The annals of his practice contain many strange episodes. Here

are a few taken from his relationship with two boys from our Home.

Episode A: Dan, 16, stands in the middle of a street trying to catch butterflies with his bare hands. The strangeness of this act lies not in the fact that he has no net. There are no butterflies. In fact, it is raining, a time when poets ask where the butterflies go. The butterflies are strictly hallucinated. Dan has taken 12 motion sickness pills purchased from the local drugstore. The word had been out that a particular brand of non-prescription pill could produce the similar effects of LSD. Dan was experimenting.

The local patrolling sheriff cut short Dan's experiment and brought him to the County hospital. And after a nurse took his blood pressure and temperature, he was introduced to "Dr. I" who cured him, or I should say, helped him.

Episode B: My staff phoned me that Steve, 17, was stumbling around the kitchen. At one point he had fallen. He had gotten into the locked cabinet where prescription medicines were kept and had taken another boy's mellaril. I advised staff to take him to hospital emergency. Steve refused to go, maintaining he was all right. But I was unwilling to let the matter slide on his word. I burst into his room like a gestapo agent. He was playing chess with another boy while two others were quietly looking on.

"Come with me. We're going to the hospital," I shrieked.

"May I ask why?" He gave me that look of calm deliberateness that went along with the concentration of chess.

"Either you go with me or I will have the sheriff bring you there." I had long since learned that you don't get into debates with boys during emergency situations. At times like this I always resorted to good, solid, authoritarian threats.

Steve cooperated. The usual procedure took place at Emergency — blood pressure, temperature, even an EKG. The doctor attending him asked if he was attempting suicide. Steve looked surprised. He had never been asked that

question before. It plainly embarrassed him. He had been depressed since he was flunking most of his classes, was out of money and suffering the restriction I imposed on him for leaving broken glass on the floor of his room.

The doctor then assured Steve that he had a medicine to counter effect the drug he had taken. The nurse brought the medicine.

“Take this,” she said.

“What is it? Is that to make me throw up?” Steve looked worried.

“Yes,” answered the nurse.

“I’m all right now. I don’t need it,” Steve assured.

“You better take it, Steve.” I lent my influence.

With the philosophic calm of Socrates downing the hemlock, Steve got a taste of his medicine, chased it with six glasses of water and for the first time in his life (and hopefully the last under these circumstances) met Dr. I, known more familiarly as Ipecac.

26

The Informer

Gary Yellek was an informer. Being the youngest in the home it was a way of getting attention from the Staff and getting even with the older guys who constantly let him know where he stood on the power scale.

On a Saturday evening Yellek came to me with some teasing information.

“I have something that would interest you, Father. What’s it worth to you?”

It should be noted that besides being an informer, Yellek was a con. There was always some kind of kickback

or reward built in his information. Tonight he was particularly angry because the boys had thrown him in the swimming pool for his refusing to take a shower.

I was hesitant to take his information, but the temptation proved too much for me.

"Here's fifty cents. Tell me what you know."

"The guys have a stash of beer. They've hidden it in the swamp cooler."

I verified the information. And when the boys went to get their six-pac they knew they had been betrayed. Gary was pleased with himself that he had broken up a potential beer party to which he would not have been invited.

In another sense I had betrayed Gary. For buying his information didn't help him with his problem. All his life he had learned to survive by his cuteness, his little con games. His whole outlook on relationships was superficial. I should have passed up the tip. And Gary should not have been given the opportunity to continue his underhanded game.

Spurred on by his new source of revenue Gary approached me the next day with more "information." He asked me if I was interested in busting the other guys for another "stash."

"Get it for me and I'll tell you if I'm interested." I could even smell the deception.

He climbed my roof and brought back something wrapped in foil.

"They hid their dope on your roof in the air conditioner."

"Let me see that."

He handed me the package. It was parsley mixed with oregano. An old trick of simulated marijuana. Gary had obviously planted it there and hoped I would buy his lie. It cost him 50 cents of his allowance. We were even.

An Act of God

I was discussing a boy's case with his probation officer when Alec Whetworth burst into the room without the politeness of a knock.

"Let me go on a bike ride. I have to pick up a letter."

Whetworth had only been with us two weeks. In that period of time he had tested most of the rules and was pushing my patience. He was 16 and had been in various foster homes. He had in his own mind outgrown anyone giving him too many rules. He had been expelled from the most lenient high school in town and from another group home which was known for taking more than their share of nonsense.

"Whetworth, you're on zero level. That means you can't go anywhere. Besides, the streets are wet and it's dark."

"I have to get that letter. I'm going." Whetworth had his way.

"Don't be calling me to pick you up."

Whetworth was still testing and getting restrictions. I would let things run their course. We would eventually come into a power struggle where he would have to back down or lose his placement in the home.

A half hour went by before the phone rang.

"This is Alec. You got to pick me up and take me to the hospital. I fell off my bike and cut my ass. I got a big cut. Need stitches. Hurry up. I'm in front of Alpha Beta Market."

A rather fiendish smile ran across my face as though I had stuck a pin in the image of Whetworth thereby causing the accident. When it came to providing emergency treatment, I couldn't take a chance.

On the way to the hospital Whetworth editorialized on his misfortune.

"I ought to sue that store. They shouldn't had that broken glass on the sidewalk."

He made the comment but didn't press things which seemed unusual for Alex who took every opportunity to accuse others.

The doctor treated him; or, I should say, attempted to treat him. Alec refused to have stitches.

"No doctor is going to touch my butt!"

I pleaded with Alex to follow the doctor's advice to prevent possible infection, but he clearly knew more than doctors. I had done my duty.

While waiting for Alec to be released, his riding partner gave me the true version of the accident.

"That was no glass he fell on. He fell on his own hash pipe. I told him not to carry it in his back pocket."

That same malevolent smile was still on my face all evening. Was what happened to Alec poetic justice or an act of God? I didn't know but the words of a wise man were vindicated: "The foolish man will suffer in the end."

28

Kidnapped with a Blessing

Jim Jorg was confused by the World. His father was the distant memory of a man he witnessed shoot a rival competitor for his mother. His mother criticized him for fighting with his sister. And a school teacher felt he had psychological problems. He was felt to be withdrawn and passive. A psychiatrist recommended a State hospital. He passively went to the hospital where he was offered group therapy and all the other therapies that look so professional in a case review.

At the hospital he was described as chronically con-

fused. He received a diagnosis of severe schizoid personality — passive aggressive. And after a year of intense treatment, it was concluded that therapy in the structured hospital setting was of no great value. It was with this background that he came to us at the age of 14.

In the four months he was with us Jim formed no close relationships. He showed very little emotion until one day a teacher rather carelessly used the phrase “funny farm” in class. All the anger he felt at being committed to a year in a psychiatric hospital suddenly surfaced. He refused to attend that teacher’s class.

School and relationships were very difficult for Jim. Sometimes it would take me a half hour to talk him into going to school. He lived in his own world of depressed feelings and wouldn’t let anyone in. Our psychiatrist was of little help to Jim. And outside of sharing our view that the boy was unfortunate, he could offer us no clues as how to help him.

It happened one day that Jim’s distant memory of his father became flesh. His dad appeared in town to attend the wedding of Jim’s sister. Upon seeing his father, Jim determined that he would ask him to live with him. He made the plea and his father accepted. But there was one problem. His mother had legal custody of him. And I had his physical custody. It seemed strange that here we had a young man described as schizoid — being split three ways: mother, father, court. His father now wanted him, but I had the authority to care for him.

“I’m taking my son with me.” The father was self-assured and determined.

“But Mr. Jorg. His mother is really his legal guardian. And the court has given me physical custody.”

“But he is my son. And I’ll get whatever legal custody I need to have.”

And so father and son departed together. It was a fairytale ending to a situation that seemed to have no solution. Mr. J did get custody. Jim got a shot at normalcy. And I got a twinge of guilt at having let a boy in my care be kidnapped.

Christmas Eve

I'm on a stage. A spotlight shines in my eyes. No, I'm not in a police lineup. It's Christmas Eve and I'm celebrating the Children's Mass at the Newman Center. Six of my boys from the home are somewhere out there among the 200 or more in the congregation. Or at least they should be there. None of my boys have ever been church-goers. Tonight they are "religious" by my choice. They had walked in with me. But I couldn't be sure they were there because of the spotlight in my eyes. One of the six, Jim, pleaded with me: "Do I have to go in? Just being inside of a Church gives me a headache."

Communion time came and the six boys received. I didn't know whether they were ritually pure. Most probably were baptized as infants or children. I knew their motivation. They came to Communion to please me, to assure me they hadn't ditched me. They wanted me to feel good. And their strategy had some value.

It's 9 pm and we're in a restaurant. The boys can order what they want. But as offspring of a fast-food society they don't really relate to any food that isn't prepared instantaneously or packaged in styrofoam. The orders arrive and I have six disappointed boys. Jim, still suffering his headache from being in a Church, is the loudest in his complaints.

"My hamburger is raw."

"Don't eat it. We'll send it back." I gave him advice but he went ahead. And when the waitress came back with the well-rehearsed question: "Is everything all right?" Jim made his complaint.

"I'm sorry. I can't do anything about it now. You should have spoken up sooner." She was part of the system. It was the same mentality Mary and Joseph must have experienced in Bethlehem in trying to find a place to

stay. I can hear someone saying: “You should have come a few days earlier.”

While we were in the restaurant I quizzed the boys about the content of my sermon. Al, who was raised a Jehovah Witness, was the only one who could answer my questions. The others had probably left during the instruction. I made it good for him and slipped him a \$5 secretly. Virtue is its own reward.

From the restaurant we went home and opened presents. This is always a tricky situation. Two years ago I remember a 13 yearold who went outside and cried after he opened his present. He got a rock polisher instead of a radio. I had since learned to give identical presents to eliminate comparisons and hurt feelings. This year I gave everyone football jersies with their names on the backs. They liked them. They gave me a sweater. I was impressed since the initiative for my present came from them.

After the present-opening we went to the local arcade where we challenged each other to the thrill of simulated race car driving, ship sinking and other electronic joys. The boys proved to be better drivers than me on the game machines. They had had more practice.

While it didn't seem to be the ideal Christmas activity to be dropping depth charges on submarines, being together was really our gift to each other.

30

Rescue

It's 5:30 am. My phone rings.

“Father Castagnola speaking.” I try to sound cheerful.

“This is John. Can you come and pick me up?”

I knew the call was inevitable. John had run away the evening before under some unusual circumstances. A former resident, Rudy, had come by about 1 am to liberate one of his friends, Jerry Moon. But Moon decided that he didn't want to be liberated, at least not by Rudy who was drunk. John had just been with us a few days. He had no loyalty and no sense. He went with Rudy for the joy ride. At 5 am he ended up in Stockton, 40 miles south of Sacramento. When Rudy decided John was of no use to him he was let out on a street corner.

"Where exactly are you, John? Get the name of the street."

He gave me directions and an hour later I arrived to rescue him.

"How come you ran away, John? You will be on restriction for the inconvenience you caused me."

"Hey, man, that's not fair that I have to be restricted for something that wasn't my fault. I just got in his car. Then I fell asleep. I wasn't planning on going anywhere with him. It wasn't my fault."

"I would like to believe you, John. But you see, if I really believed you then I would have to also believe in my own stupidity. And I'm not willing to do that."

John lived with my decision. And he stayed with us for three months before he persuaded his social worker to get him a foster home. He went to the foster home for six months before asking to come back to our home.

When he was with us the second time around, he kept asking me to get him into the Sheriff's Ride-a-long program. This was a situation where teenagers could spend an 8 hour shift with an actual sheriff-on-duty. I stalled. I wasn't sure John was ready for this kind of privilege.

When you least expect it, your phone rings when any civilized person would not call. This time it was 2 am.

"Father, this is John. Can you come and pick me up?"

"No, I can't."

John had "run away". He was angry with one of the staff. I didn't feel it was my duty to continually play rescue. He was ten miles away. He had gotten to where he was. He

could return on his own. It was at this moment that John devised his own ride-a-long program. He called the police to give him a ride back home. He repeated this stunt a couple of weeks later. And in both instances the police remarked how cooperative he was. If they only knew his motivation!

John didn't like the restrictions I imposed on him for his ride-a-long program. He decided to run and not call the cops to return him. He got placed in another home and then another. He would last in a home up to the point when the person in charge would give him a restriction.

He was 17 when he left us. A psychologist had described him at 13:

"His outlook on life is that of a whipped dog who often growls and tries to bite back. But mostly he feels alone, pitiable, defenseless — on the outside looking in, and painfully empty and deprived."

The human personality is difficult to describe, even by analogy. For a whipped dog might stray, but it wouldn't call the cops for a ride home.

31

The Book of Records

Our boys have compiled some unenviable records, a few of which are now published.

1) **Longest Shower:** Rod M set this record in 1977 with a shower in excess of one hour. It would have gone longer had I not turned off the Home's main water valve. His record is contested by Freddie E who left the shower running for an hour and a half. His time is not recognized since

he left the water running to simulate his presence in the shower while in fact he left the bathroom through the window and engaged in the successful act of runaway from the Home.

2) Least Paid Street Musician in History: Kirc set this record in 1973. Without ever having a guitar lesson and without ever having learned a chord, he posted himself at San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square and strummed for the passers-by with a collection hat at his feet. Perhaps he would have had a few nickels thrown his way had he hung a sign around his neck: "Help pay for my lessons."

3) Fastest Sales: David Funero in 1976 took a \$200 roll-top desk, property of the Home, moved it to the front lawn, instituted a "yard sale" and within ten minutes sold it to a passerby for \$10. The staff on duty was unaware of his maneuver.

On another occasion he took an encyclopedia from the Home and sold it to a used book dealer for \$10. Having grown bolder from his first success, he employed one of my staff for transportation to the dealer.

4) Most Death-defying Act: In 1975 Pat Berkeley leapt head first through a quarter inch thick plate glass window in the office of his high school dean of boys. He was called in for drinking alcohol on campus. And when he heard the words: "I have to call Father," he sought an exit. He suffered no cuts and made a successful escape.

5) Most Unusual Animal Trainer: Vince Planter in 1973 trained the Home's cats and dogs to deposit their "waste matter" on the living room rug by spraying the product Scent inside the home when it was designed by the manufacturers to be sprayed outside.

6) Most Unusual Collection for Charity: was made in 1971 by Gerard who removed his artificial leg and went through the neighborhood on crutches collecting for charity. His home-made collection can had this inscription: "Give to Red Cross Crippled Children" and there was a drawing of a boy on crutches with a leg severed at the knee. Gerard's collec-

tion can should have read: "Con-rippled Child" and it would have been a legitimate charity.

7) Most Kleenix Used in a Day: This distinction belongs to Jerry Moon who was allergic to Sacramento's pollen as well as to authority. In 1977 he left a trail of over 200 used kleenix all over the Home. My Director Jack Pites picked them all up and deposited them in his room. After Moon left our Home at 18 he left a few bad checks around town with me for a reference. In those instances we did no picking up.

8) Best Impersonation of a Priest: Sammy Ortiz in 1971 wore my priest uniform to his public high school where he successfully counseled his peers to a better life. He had no such luck with the administration who sent him home for a change of clothes.

10) Most Polite Runaway: Curtis A, nicknamed "Person" ran away from the Home in 1972. But before doing so asked my permission to go to the store. (After his runaway he was returned to the Home and made a successful adjustment).

11) Constructive Housebreaking: This award also goes to Curtis for his five foot drive in our Home van. One morning I left the vehicle with motor running to warm up. Curtis put the vehicle into gear and it surged through the exterior wall of the family room. With a wall ruined I decided to expand the room.

32

A Confirmed Pedestrian

Oran Dinell was a happy-go-lucky kid with a sense of immortality. One day he was out bike riding with a friend and

turned a corner with a wide arc right onto a busy street. He was hit by a van traveling at 40 mph, carried a couple hundred feet and deposited on the pavement tangled with the aluminum of his bike. The ambulance was called and he was rushed to the hospital.

In the weeks following his accident a surgeon put him back together. Two severely smashed legs were operated on and through the miracle of modern surgery, Oran was on his feet after six weeks.

Though I didn't mention it in the "Book of Records", Oran had previously to this serious accident held the record of: "most trips to the hospital by ambulance." And with this third trip, his record will probably never be challenged.

Oran's first trip to the hospital by ambulance occurred in this manner. He was at the local skating rink where he had many worshipers in the form of younger girls. At about 11:30 pm while he was skating backwards he ran into someone and fell down. He stayed on the floor apparently in great pain. I arrived on the scene moments before the ambulance attendants put him on the stretcher. The examination at the hospital revealed no breaks or sprains. But the x rays could not detect "hurt pride". And I wondered if that was his way of coping when he stumbled in front of his admirers.

His second trip to the hospital by ambulance had less of the dramatic. On this occasion he was on his bicycle and fell in front of his school. His audience this time was another boy from the home. The emergency room x rays again revealed no breaks, and he was released in good condition.

It was by some strange kind of progression that Nature was trying to tell this 17 year old something about life. And while he was healing in the hospital after his real injury, he did some serious reflecting on his values. But like many serious students, Oran needed some post graduate studies. A month after he was out of the hospital he bought another bicycle. And within a few weeks he had

another narrow escape. This time only his bike suffered a bent wheel at the fender of a compact car.

From that day on Oran became a pedestrian.

33

The Recruiter

Marty Sinclair came to our group home at the age of 15 because he needed some space from an over-authoritarian father. No matter where we took Marty, motherly types wanted to adopt him. He had all the qualities one fantasizes about an "Oliver."

In truth Marty was a rather model boy during the year he was with us before returning to his father. He had a bad mood now and then. But he was generally polite and reliable. He wasn't interested in drugs, violence and all the other "nice" things one usually associates with the teenager of today.

When he left us at 16 we were saddened to see him go. We had just got to know him a little. But we were happy that he had his problems ironed out.

A few months passed and we hadn't heard from Marty. Then one day he showed up at the Home. Everyone was so happy to see him that they didn't reflect on the fact it was a school day. No one stopped to ask: "What is he doing here at noon, when his school is twenty miles away?"

As it turned out Marty appeared at the home for a purpose other than a friendly visit. He was recruiting men to help him settle a dispute. Apparently a bully at his new school was picking on him daily. Marty had gone to the school administration but got no relief from harassment. Thus it was that he determined his old "brothers" at the Home would avenge him.

Without our knowing anything or suspecting foul intent, Marty recruited five boys from the Home to be his shock troops. That very afternoon all five truanted from their respective schools to be with Marty at his school. They arrived by bus. Marty had provided the fare. The bully was pointed out. And Marty began to settle his score with the backing of the five if he needed help. When the fight started the police were called in and the “Bodyguards” were all cited for trespassing. Marty was not cited because he was not on a school campus where he didn’t belong. An angry school administrator informed me that the citations would hold and that the matter was being forwarded to the Sacramento Court.

The Recruited Five awaited their court date. I attended with them. The judge dismissed the charge since I assured him that the boys had paid the penalty of a month’s restriction.

And the Recruiter? He heard Uncle Sam say: “I want you.” and joined the Army.

34

Institutional Addict

Mory was made a dependent of the court as a small child. He with his brothers and sisters was removed from a home where a foster parent had beaten a baby brother to death. Mory later lived with his natural mother but was unhappy in that situation. He had the stereotyped battered-child syndrome — fear, depression, felling of hopelessness, negativism towards authority.

The Court placed Mory in our care when he was 14. He had been convicted of a theft, \$50 worth of toys from a department store. And he had attempted to steal from his

mother's neighbor. He was unhappy with his mother and the Court felt he could be helped in a group home.

During his first year with us Mory had his problems with authority. He was suspended from school for cussing out teachers. And he smoked some marijuana. Then, as happens with most marijuana smokers in his age group, he got involved in theft. He took a few articles from our next door neighbor. While the neighbor did not press charges, I dismissed Mory gently from our program and asked his court to allow him to live with his mother. Both Mory and his mother agreed to the arrangement. But three months later Mory called me from Juvenile Hall. "Can I come and live with you?" He pleaded. He had turned himself in because he couldn't get along with his mother. Since he was a delinquent ward of the court, he had the privilege of turning himself in without committing a crime.

I took Mory back. And during his second year with me he changed his style. He didn't rip-off the community. He simply broke into my living quarters. The first time he burglarized me I didn't press any charges and handled the matter with restrictions. But the second (known) time he broke into my place, I pressed charges and sent him back to court. The court in turn sent him back to his mother who had moved to the Los Angeles area.

After being with his mother for a few months he wrote me the following letter:

Dear Father,

I am going to school and am not having any problems. My mother is happy that I am at home. I really try to help her around the house. I already know a lot of people. I haven't smoked dope for several months and I feel like a different person. Father, I am sorry for what I did to you and your house. Will you forgive me? I am praying to God that you will. You didn't do anything to make me go inside your house. I did it because I was looking for money and I did it on my own.

So take care and God bless you.

Love,

Your best friend,

Mory

I read the letter with some skepticism but I felt good about Mory. Perhaps he was going straight. Two weeks after the letter came I got a phone call from him.

“Is it ok if I come up and spend a few days with you? I don’t have any school. We have a quarter break. It’s ok with my mother.”

I agreed to the proposition. And as events turned out I made a big mistake. I did not check out his request with his L.A. probation officer. Had I done so I would have found out that there was a warrant for him in L.A. for burglary.

Mory stayed with me for a few days. I gave him bus fare to go back to his mother. But instead of taking a bus back home, he stayed in the area moving in with a former school friend. And when he wore out his welcome there, he burglarized our Boys’ Homes. For the first time in our history a former resident stole from his peers. Mory, the battered child, had broken an almost sacred code. And he didn’t stop with burglarizing the homes. He stole a car to transport his goods. He disappeared for a few days and then returned to the scene of his crime all scarred up as though he had been in an auto accident.

We had him arrested. And I visited him in juvenile hall. His reaction to the whole situation was summed in his familiar saying: “I’ll do my time.”

Now at 18 Mory is the same battered child. But he is also a burglar. He cannot cope with daily decision-making. And when pressures get to him he steals. He doesn’t try to get caught. But he takes chances that inevitably get him locked up.

If he should write me another letter asking forgiveness, I would certainly forgive. But I would not make the mistake of trusting him or thinking he was rehabilitated. One can forgive yet withhold trust.

While I am optimistic about human nature, I feel certain individuals grow addicted to institutions and the protection they offer from the stress of earning a living.

Mory is an institutional addict. I suspect that every time he is released from one, he will find a way to get back there.

On the Run

“Tell my story. And you can use my name.”

I had asked Jack Anthony if he was willing to tell me something about his runaways from various foster homes. I was curious to know how a youngster of 15 years survives for a month or two without home or parents. And in his case I was all the more curious because he was not a delinquent youngster. Not only did he have no juvenile record, but he was an example of integrity at the Home. What I am about to relate is an interview I had with Jack. But I did not grant his request of using his real name.

Q. When do you first recall running away from home?

A. I was in the 4th grade. Me and my sister took off for a night.

Q. Why did you run away?

A. It was always the same reason. I've told you about that before. I was the treatment we got from my Mom.

Q. You lived with your mom until you were about 12. While you were living with her did you run away for any longer periods of time?

A. No, most of the time it would just be for a day or two. I did my big runaways when I was in foster homes. I would take off for about a month or two before I would turn myself in.

Q. Were you alone when you were on the run?

A. No, I was always with my older brother.

Q. What did you do for food and shelter?

A. You're not going to bust me for what I tell you?

Q. I told you I wouldn't. The past is past.

A. Well, we stayed most of the time at this boarding house where people would let us in. Sometimes we slept in cars. And sometimes we ate at my mom's.

Q. Why would you eat at your mom's? Wasn't the main reason you were in a foster home was the fact she punished you at mealtimes? Did you stay overnight at her

house? Didn't she call the cops on you because you ran away from your foster home?

A. My mom wouldn't let us stay at night because she was afraid the cops would come looking for us and she didn't want any cops around. She fed us because we gave her money.

Q. You gave her money? That means you had to be into stealing.

A. Me and my brother stole things and sold them. We would take batteries, especially from new cars and get \$15 a piece for them.

Q. Did you break into houses?

A. Yes. Me and my brother took TVs and radios. Sometimes we even sat down and ate people's food while we watched their TV before taking it.

Q. You don't strike me as being so bold. Why would you eat peoples' food before ripping them off?

A. We only did that with the people we hated.

Q. Weren't you afraid of getting caught?

A. No, once we walked down the street with a color TV we stole.

Q. Where did you store your stolen articles? And who did you sell them to?

A. We usually stored them at my mom's. There were always people ready to buy what we had. And they knew they were hot.

Q. In all the times that you and your brother were on the run, didn't a cop ever stop you?

A. We only got stopped once. A cop asked us why we weren't in school. I told him I had a dental appointment and my brother told him he was a high school dropout. He let us go.

Q. It's really hard for me to picture you ripping off anyone. Why did you do it?

A. I've never stole except when I was with my brother. I don't know if that's the reason I stole. It was kind of like I went along with him.

Q. Where's your brother now?

A. He's in jail facing counts of arson and burglary.

When I finished my interview with Jack I felt I had to be very careful not to let his revelations interfere with the trust I had built in him. And it happened that very evening of the interview another boy reported his radio missing. When I questioned the boys, Jack was quick to say: "Do you think I did it because of what I told you about myself?"

I assured him of my trust. And a few minutes later the guilty party was discovered.

36

The Cost

One of the more interesting boys was Walden Hash. I relate here part of an interview. He was eager to relate his story.

"When I was three, me, my brother and sister were taken away from our parents and stuck in an institution on a hill. I wasn't used to being in a room by myself. Me and my brother always slept in the same bed at home. I remember my parents coming to visit me. That evening I crept out of my window and went to the parking lot. I expected them to still be there — ready to take me home. I remember staying in the parking lot until staff came and brought me in the house."

"From the age of 3 to 6 all I remember is my old man being in and out of prison. I couldn't remember how long we were at that first institution — probably three months. My parents used to leave us at friends' homes for days at a time. My mother did a lot of bar-hopping. And the neighbors reported my parents to the police for not taking care of us kids. I had a doberman and I tied myself to it so the cops would have to take the dog with me. They stuck me

somewhere else. I was 6 now. I remember having lunch for the first time. I remember being teased for peeing in my bed. My mother got me out of that place in a few weeks. But then a few weeks later I was locked up again. It was Christmas. I remember the cheap toys they gave us. I busted them all up."

"After a while they stuck me, my brother and sister in different foster homes. They (the social welfare people) tried to bust up our family. I remember my first foster mother. She tried to get me to love her. My foster father hit me. And their own son was spoiled rotten. Once I got beaten for wrecking some plumbing. Their son had bought some powerful firecracker at a 4th of July stand and I set it off in a toilet. He would beat me with a ping pong paddle. But I didn't mind him as much as my foster mother and her stupid games of trying to get my affection. Once I got a letter from my dad in jail and she would not read me the whole thing. They (social workers and foster parents) always tried to keep us split up."

"I guess I was in that first home about a year. Then they moved me into the home of my dad's sister. I hated my aunt. She was the one who taught my dad how to steal. She would starve us and we had to scrounge for scraps from the other kids' lunches at school. And then she got pissed because we were scrounging at school. She only took me and my brother in so she could collect money from the welfare. We never got seconds on food. And she always got the dented cans. I remember one Thanksgiving me and my brother had to eat in the den because my aunt had guests over for dinner. It was at this period of my life that I remember making enemies at school. My aunt confined me to the backyard as punishment. That's when I learned to do flips from the swing. I guess I was with that witch for a year before they put me back with my mother."

"When I was with my mother I went wild. I could roam the neighborhood. And there were the people next door who always called the cops on my mom because she had no control over me. I remember my dad got out of jail about this time and he threatened to shoot my mom's boyfriend."

My mom and dad were back together now and since they couldn't pay the rent we camped out on the river. I remember killing squirrels for food, swinging on the trees floating down the river. There was no school to go to. I was free."

"I remember dad beating my mother when he was drunk. He was choking her and my sister had to beat him on the head to get him to stop. It wasn't too long after this my mom and dad were arrested for stealing tires. I remember how my brother bit the fingers of the cop when he pointed his finger at my mom.

"I was 9 now and I began a series of foster homes. They sent me back to my original foster home. But they didn't like me the second time around. They got rid of me because I was getting their son in trouble — throwing rocks at cars. I shifted around in so many foster homes I've forgotten half of them. The usual routine of foster parents was to tell me that I would not see my mom and dad again, that I had to get used to them. So I purposely got kicked out so I could be sent back to the Receiving Home so I could see my brother and sister and find out what was happening in my family."

"They sent me back to live with my mother. Again we camped out on the river and I used to steal from the Safeway store. Stealing was easy. We would just fill up our bags and walk out of the store like we had paid. I found a cabin with some money and marijuana which I took. I wasn't interested in being a burglar, just wanted food and shelter. I was caught for breaking into the cabin by the owner, but since he had marijuana, he made a deal with me — he wouldn't press charges if I returned the marijuana."

"I didn't stay too long with my mother before they placed me in another foster home with my sister. I had a cat there. I taught the cat to climb trees and my cat could beat up every cat and dog in the neighborhood. I had a bee-bee gun in this home and I played a lot of army. But they got sick of me and I got sick of them so I was moved to another home."

“I don’t know why these other people took me in. They tried to tell me that they weren’t getting paid for taking care of me. They were Church people who tried to shove God down my throat. When they made me go to Church with them I would fart to embarrass them. When I was asked to say grace before meals, I would say ‘rub-adub-dub, thanks for the grub.’ And they had a daughter four years older than me. She was a bitch. I kept telling the people I wanted out of their home. But they wouldn’t listen to me. So I had to spray their daughter with some insecticide until they got the idea. Actually, I ran away after I did that and was picked up by the cops. I was incorrigible by now. And they sent me to a children’s institution. They didn’t like me at the children’s home. I guess I was corrupting the younger children with my stealing. So they sent me to the State Hospital. They said I was a sadist and a masochist and I would have to spend three months at the Hospital. They kept me there for two years. They fucked me up with drugs. They were experimenting with me and didn’t care whether they were right or wrong as long as they looked good.”

I interrupted Hash’s narrative to ask him why they labeled him masochistic and sadistic.

“I was masochistic because I had another inmate give me a tatoo. And I also practiced hyperventilation — making myself pass out. My brother learned this in another institution and he taught it to me. I was sadistic because I was always instigating fights.”

“After the State Hospital I was placed in a foster home that charged my county \$1,300 a month for my keep. I was there with this man and two other guys for about three months. I remember stealing marijuana from the guy in charge. He would give us some once in a while but it was ragweed. He would keep the good stuff for himself. I split from this home and went back to my Mom. But the cops picked me up and brought me to juvenile hall. I stayed there until you got me.”

Hash came to us at 14. He was with us a few months when he took to the road. He returned after six months of

adventure hitch-hiking around the country living on roots and mushrooms. He turned himself into juvenile hall and waited his turn for replacement with us. On his second time around he did some growing up though he never dealt with his basic problem of anger against authority.

At 16 with only a few high school credits and volcanic restlessness he decided to hit the road again — a nomad like his father.

I've related Hash's story to show that taxpayers may be the ones who need a shrink. My figuring shows that the public through the welfare system paid a minimum of \$70,000 to care for him during his adolescent years. Multiply this by five and you have the cost of taking care of his brothers and sisters. And the money is not so much paid for rehabilitation but to keep the kids out of society's hair. Hash and his siblings literally bit the helping hand.

What is the answer? I don't have one. But to jail a father for petty theft and then spend \$500,000 to care for his children hardly seems to be a solution befitting an intelligent people. Perhaps our legal system could find room for sentencing a parent to care for his family.

38

An Anthropological Thought

Imagine for a moment that some Vesuvius should spray lava on our Boys' Home thus preserving it intact for a curious anthropologist of the 24th century. The anthropologist enters my bedroom closet and finds a wooden box. He opens it and discovers knives, clubs and a curious assortment of artifacts which bear little resemblance except that they all contain the resin of a substance Twentieth

Centurians called marijuana. He publishes his findings in the scientific journals. It reads as follows:

“Perhaps the most exciting discovery since the find of King Tut’s treasure is the box found in the bedroom of a priest. It was exciting not because the artifacts were made of gold or contained much material value. But in that box the history of mankind was recapitulated. All known stages of mankind’s evolutionary growth were somehow contemporary in what appeared to be some kind of institution for adolescents.”

“Allow me to make myself crystal clear. The articles of most importance in this recapitulation are the “pipes.” The diary of the priest found underneath the pillow of his unmade bed contained this statement: ‘I took a club from underneath Tony’s mattress today and I found a hash pipe in Chris’s jacket pocket.’”

“The diary statement thus sheds light on that feature of Twentieth Century culture that Zig our Benevolent Autocrat of Century 23 abolished: the use of cigarettes and drugs. The so-called pipes in the priest’s collection must have been used by the boys in his care. And he must have been 300 years ahead of his time in outlawing their use. Other evidence discovered from that period indicates such pipes were sold in public stores while the smokeable content was outlawed on the books but much in use. At any rate I have schematized the collection as follows:

1) Antidiluvian Man: He of course had no tools. His pipe is the most primitive. It is constructed from the inside roll of what was called vulgarly, “toilet paper”, a bit of aluminum foil and masking tape. And it was apparently disposable. I list it with the most primitive life because of its simplicity of construction rather than from the fact of its disposability.

2) Neanderthal Man: As the cave man gathered mud from the river for his artifacts, the 20th Century adolescent bought a school shop care thus entitling him to clay and a public tax-supported teacher and equipment to produce his pipes.

3) Bronze Age Man: He perhaps had the easiest pipe to

make. All he needed was a few coins to purchase parts from his local plumbing store. All the various fittings used in that century's plumbing allowed a variety.

4) Classical Man (or Renaissance Man). The artifacts of this period are handcarved, usually of wood. Some of the priest's collection appeared to be made of broom handles. Another was carved from what appeared to be the handle of a dresser drawer. Further investigation revealed that it did match the handles on a dresser in the home (with a handle missing).

5) Twentieth Century Man: He apparently was given an "allowance" (a term which was used in days before our Benevolent Autocrat made work without monetary compensation obligatory for adolescents). With this allowance the youth could purchase a "concert kit" at the local "head shop". This was a commercialized plastic box complete with matches, rolling paper, filters, a plastic bag, and, of course, the pipe."

"Besides providing the scientific world with a new approach to anthropology, the box in the priest's closet contains a contemporary study on weaponry. But I will leave this subject to a future discussion."

37

The System Breaker

"What do I have to do? Go down to the corner and throw a brick through a store window and wait for you guys to arrest me?"

The sheriffs listened patiently, but their frustration mounted as Tommy, our angry 13 yearold, stated his intention. The youngster had wanted out of our Home, but no

one would respond. The sheriffs seemed puzzled as they questioned him in our living room.

"Why do you want out? You have food and shelter, someone to take care of you"

"If you don't take me to the hall, I'll run and I'll destroy something and then you'll have to take me in." Tommy was determined to make his point. The sheriffs were now angry.

"Look, kid, that's crazy. Why would you commit a crime? Don't you get along with the Father?"

"Father's all right. But I want to go home. And no one listens to me. My social worker never listens to me."

"Can you stay here until the Father calls your worker tomorrow. I've got a lot of things to do tonight. I don't want you running away and causing any trouble. Can you stay here tonight?"

Tommy did calm down for the evening and refrained from brick-throwing. The youngster had been with us for about five months when he decided it was time to pressure the court to send him back to his mother. His case was rather classic for those who work in placement. His parents were divorced and custody of him and his brothers and sisters was awarded to his mother. But she could not exercise suitable care and the children were removed from her for a temporary period. And when the time came for her children to be returned, Tommy was not invited back. He was scapegoated for the family disorder.

Tommy was beyond his mother's control. He wouldn't attend school. By the time he was in the 6th grade he had attended 10 different schools. His natural father offered him no support and his stepfather only gave him ridicule for his obesity . . . He was made to feel the truth of the lines of a poem: "Thirteen's no age at all . . . thirteen's nothing." In Tommy's case he was made to feel this way most of his life. He was no different at 13 than he was at 10. He was only more sophisticated in his manipulations and his sense of power over the adult world.

He used this power when he threatened to throw a brick through a store window and thereby force law en-

forcement to take action. In his own primitive way he had figured out the laws pertaining to the custody of children. His mother had moved to a different county but had not established residence. Therefore his case was not transferred. His mother had promised to take him back with her. But she gave the excuse of the court not allowing it. His mother made him feel that judges and social workers were the bad guys. Yet through all this he suspected his mother's rejection and he was unwilling to let her get away with it.

Two days after Tommy had threatened the sheriff with his intent to throw a brick through a window in order to get back to court, he did in fact throw a chair through a window of our Home. Ordinarily I would have dealt with the incident in terms of restriction. But I sensed a need to take Tommy's direction. He wanted to go to court, to bring matters to a head so mother and court would have to get into the act. I played his game and pressed charges. He waited 30 days and the local court referred him to his mother's county. Tommy got home his own way. He had figured out the system and manipulated it with a misdemeanor.

Now all he has to do is figure out his mother and learn to live with her.

39

A New Metaphysics

Tony Morales possessed a unique power as a 16 yearold. He had a way of generating irrational impulses in the people most known for their rationality: school teachers and administrators. Once a teacher wrote:

"I want him out of this class. He has had crafts for three semesters and is not making any progress. He just comes and goes as he pleases. He cannot read or write well enough to do any of the class tests or assignments. Semester grade is F/F.

Another teacher wrote in utter exasperation: "He just follows his own directions and pays no attention to what I say."

Tony was not simply going through the normal stage of adolescent rebellion common among most of his peers. Actually, he was developing in his ability to use reason. When he first came to our Home at 13, he settled every dispute with a fight. We watched him develop. But he still had many rough edges.

There are many things I could say about Tony, but the thing I find most amazing is how he defied the metaphysician's famed "principle of contradiction." This fundamental principle of reason states: "a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time." Here's how Tony did it. Because of his non-observance of his school's smoking regulations he managed to get 3 five-day suspensions within a seven day period of time. Now I can understand how someone could get the 3 suspensions within a 10 day period of time: Example:

Suspension One: January 2

Suspension Two: January 7

Suspension Three: January 12

In the example cited, the suspendee has in the first instance carried out his sentence before being again suspended. But in Tony's case he received three in the period of 7 days. Now according to rational law he could not be suspended while in the state of suspension. For he was either suspended or not-suspended, and if suspended that suspension had to either be extended in days or into a new category such as expulsion. But in Tony's case, he was allowed to attend school (for inside work experience) while in the state of suspension. Thus, when he lit up another cigarette while at work he received his third. So much for mind-twisters.

What is important to note about Tony is the fact he did not wear out our school district. For every teacher he thoroughly exasperated, there was another who knew how to handle him.

There are certain intuitive teachers who know that certain individuals need a certain kind of space without necessarily having to know the details for the child's history. In Tony's case he had been in many foster homes and institutions. When asked he couldn't recall the number of homes he had been sent to as a child. When I asked why he didn't stay in any one place, he recalled an incident that was symbolic.

"In one foster home I remember getting into a fight with the parents because they served fish sticks and I wouldn't eat them. But that isn't the real reason I didn't get along. They wanted me to call them Mother and Dad. And I won't do that for no one."

Tony, like so many kids in placement did not know his parents. And so he grew up with a rather skeptical view of adults and authorities. Not being hypocritical, he would not pretend to relate as a dutiful son in order to win praise and affection. And it was precisely this attitude which caused him so much problem in school. He could not conform to authority figures.

Tony did serve his three suspensions — the "metaphysics breaker." And on the day he arrived to begin school having served his time, he stepped on school property with a cigarette in hand. This time he was expelled. Those with a psychological explanation said: "Tony wanted to get expelled." My view was less complicated: "He was careless, as usual. And he didn't realize people were watching him that closely."

His school story had a happy ending. Because the wisdom of our school district took into account his stage of development, he was reinstated into a learning disability program in another school. And he had no further problem with smoking on campus. And he did not become another statistical dropout.

Forced Vacation

I'm very poor at recalling dreams, but I've had a recurrent one which deserves some analysis. The place of the dream is a courtroom. And there are only two people — the judge and me. I'm, not sure what crime I've committed but the judge sentences me to live with him. At this point the dream becomes a nightmare because the judge is Troy Aldo, a 15 yearold we sent back to live with his parents. Fortunately, I always awaken after the sentencing and do not find Troy in my room.

The truth of the matter is that Troy was no dream. He lived in our Home as a 13 yearold and as a 15 yearold with his 14th year spent with his mother. I liked Troy but somehow he just didn't get along with the other boys. He was always in some kind of conflict. He had the "only child syndrome" and couldn't stand the competition for attention. He was always in fights, usually with boys older than himself. He had a sharp wit and a sharper tongue.

One day after more than usual stress he wrote me a note:

"Dear Father Cas,

I really do regret writing you this letter. I know you and everybody in this house hates me so I am giving you my week's notice for leaving. I am not running away. I am simply taking a vacation. So don't worry about me. You wouldn't anyway. I am sorry for all the trouble I have given you and the Home. And I know you are not sorry for all the trouble you have given me. So I will see you later.

Troy

As events turned out Troy did not take his vacation. He was one of the few kids I've taken in who had a home to return to. He was basically a beyond-control brat whose parents wanted him when he reformed and conformed. We helped Troy to straighten out. And we sent him home

twice. Actually, he would have been sentenced to stay with us a third time, but I think the juvenile court judge had mercy on me.

A few days after Troy left our Home after his second stay, he got arrested for auto theft. But he really didn't steal a car. He was invited to a party. And one of his friends, the son of a used-car dealer, loaned him a car from his dad's lot for the evening. He was given instructions about where the car was to be returned. But in trying to find his friend's dad's car lot, he ran out of gas. A Highway Patrolman stopped to inquire about such things as license and registration — not to mention curfew. Submissively, Troy surrendered and covered for his friend who was so generous in loaning him the car.

He got a three week vacation in juvenile hall.

41

Psychic Phenomena

There have been days when I've used a mystical or parapsychological approach to discipline in the daily living situation. And while this approach may not seem orthodox, I feel the seasoned childcare worker will understand.

One evening I solved a mystery with ESP. George came to me with great distress because his wristwatch disappeared. He naturally suspected a case of theft. I was able to assure him that his watch would be recovered. First I called a house meeting to see whether any of the other five boys had either taken it or seen it. They all replied in the negative. Then, as though directed by some astral illumination, I entered George's room. As I approached the bed of his roommate I felt a certain dizziness combined with a

change in body temperature. I lifted up the mattress. There was nothing. I paused for a minute wondering if I was losing my instinct. The watch had to be near the bed. I checked the mattress for cuts. The inside of a mattress is a natural hiding place for small articles. Everything was intact. And then as I was about to give up, I remembered there was a heater vent by the bed. I took it apart. Nothing. George was beginning to say, "I knew I wouldn't get it back," when the illumination presented one more option. There was a picture over his roommate's bed.

"George, carefully move that picture from the wall." He followed my direction and his watch dropped safely in his hands.

In the moments that followed the find I confronted his roommate with the possibility of an attempted theft. He strenuously denied any evil intent. Thus I had to chalk up another mystery to some devious poltergeist.

Over the course of years one must develop psychic powers if he is to last in the field of childcare. Among the more important I would list clairvoyance and prognostication with an occasional need for exorcism, which while not being a psychic power *per se* does deal with the unseen world of diabolic possession.

Clairvoyance is essential in dealing with those boys you don't particularly trust. Once two boys asked permission to jog around the block. Since they were on restriction, I gave them a warning: "You have permission to jog around the block, but be back in ten minutes."

The ten minutes were up. They hadn't returned. I concentrated and with an inner eye I saw them at the corner store buying cigarettes. Their feet were bare. They had not been jogging. I drove to the corner and verified the illumination.

Perhaps the most useful psychic power I've developed over the years is prognostication. And while I possess this power to a high degree, I will not use it for political purposes. Nor will I be exploited for sensationalism.

With that preface I will explain how prognostication, the ability to forecast future events works in a boy's home.

I must admit my methods parallel that of the great psychics who predict earthquakes with 70% accuracy by studying faults and the frequency of tremors. I can predict with 90% accuracy when I will find Tony's room a mess without even having seen it.

Regarding exorcism I have one continual problem, the demons that the boys buy in poster form and hang on their walls. Exorcism is a simple process of removing thumb-tacks.

I've mentioned just a few psychic phenomena which are a daily part of boys' home life. I am presently working on a project of thought transference. I want to be able to think of a particular boy and by doing so influence his thinking. I foresee thinking "Tony" and "room cleanup", "George" and "getting serious", "Lynn" and "attending school", etc. Eventually I hope to work with such unusual categories as "giving" and "sharing."

42

The Sting of Life

I'll call him "Pleasant X". The "pleasant" refers to atmosphere he generates around himself. The "X" refers to the anonymity of slavery. For PX was a slave to his own anger and inhibitions.

PX was placed in our Home by the court in 1975 at the age of 15. At this writing he is 18 awaiting emancipation upon the completion of high school. His history in our Home is so unique, this book would not be complete without some mention of his personality.

Like many of the kids placed with us, PX spent his early years in a children's home after the split-up of his

parents. And at the age of 13 he got his first taste of juvenile hall after an episode of violence. The clinical psychologist who saw him at this time stated:

“He has a high degree of anxiety in relating to people outside of his immediate family. The emotional problems of his mother and the disruption of his home life have caused him a great deal of anxiety. Given a home situation or a group home situation where he can trust adults, I would not anticipate anything more than the average acting out of a restless, bright, 13 yearold boy.”

At the time of this statement, he was placed in a foster home. There was a runaway and a placement in another foster home. This second home dismissed him for unusual behavior (cutting up his clothes) and he was admitted to the adolescent unit of a psychiatric hospital for diagnosis. Here he continued to manifest his unhappiness. The reports called his state “catatonic.” He was discharged after a short time with a label: “borderline schizophrenia with episodes of overt psychosis”. PX who at 13 was simply described as a “bright restless boy” now had the real possibility of becoming a real mental health statistic.

For the first nine months he was with us PX behaved very well. Then for the next four months there were spasmodic episodes of breakage. A few mirrors, windows and a door were his victims. And after each incident there was that blank stare — the expression that must have looked like a “catatonic state” to the psychiatric people. PX seemed to recover quickly from each incident, but since he never talked about his feelings we didn’t make any progress. He was a hidden explosive. He paid for his damages by work but never quite made a commitment to resolve his anger in a more constructive way.

After PX was with us a year he went on a three day regression which included breakage of windows and barricading himself in his room. I had him admitted to the psychiatric hospital for evaluation. And this time he was placed with the adults. Our psychiatrist wisely determined it would be a better reality situation for him rather than the

coziness of the adolescent unit. This tall handsome youngster was no longer a child.

While hospitalized he revealed nothing of his feelings. Every question I asked him was answered with an "I don't know." Looking back it probably was the only way he could cope with those of us who wanted to know what made him tick.

We took him out of the hospital after a week. And there were no out-of-control incidents at the Home for the next few months. He was telling us by his actions he didn't particularly like the life style of an adult "crazy."

Then just as I was feeling he had conquered his problem of irrational behavior, I was informed he had removed a sliding glass door and dropped it 12 feet from a balcony to express anger with one of my childcare workers. Strangely the door did not break or suffer any damage. I used the occasion for a warning that any further malicious mischief meant a trip to juvenile hall and not the hospital. I was convinced that PX could control his behavior.

A few months later in anger against another staff, he poured shampoo over a good section of the Home. After doing so he returned to his room. I was called to the scene and burst into his room like a madman.

"Either you clean up the mess now, or you go to juvenile hall where I press charges for malicious mischief. Are you going to clean it?"

There was a moment of silence. I had hoped PX would cooperate. I did not want to take him to juvenile hall. We were at a crossroad. I was unwilling to be lenient. Because leniency towards him had not been helpful. He was not a delicate flower. He could handle reality without medication or coddling words.

"I'll go to the hall," he responded.

I booked him with a citizen's arrest. The intake officer gave me that funny look when I described the charges, but he was familiar with the boys' home scene. There was the mugshot, the fingerprinting and all the paraphernalia with the booking procedure. And the door slammed on PX for a few days before his detention hearing. I went to him before

his hearing and asked him if he liked the place. He was able to say he wanted to come back and cooperate, so I dropped charges.

Since that dose of reality PX has not only abstained from any malicious mischief, but for the last year and a half has become my number one fix-it, handyman. Instead of breaking windows he replaces the broken ones. Anything I need done from replacement of doors to light switches, he is available to do it. And his work is quality.

In making strides against his anger, the more creative imaginative side of his personality was released. I'll cite one example. One day he noticed a swarm of bees surrounding a tree on our property. Within a few hours he got hold of a book on how to care for bees, found the materials, made a home for them, made himself an outfit from old window screens, captured the bees, cared for them and made them the tourist attraction of the neighborhood. When asked if he got stung in his home-made outfit, he answered: "A few times."

PX began to take pride in everything he did. And at 18 after experiencing various stings in the process of growing up, he proved the words of the clinical psychologist to be prophetic — he was restless, intelligent — but no longer a "boy."

PART II

Dialogues with Professor Reganeet

Study #1 — Eating Habits

The Professor had committed himself to a thorough study of our Homes and was prepared to spend up to a year in analysis if necessary. Being a somewhat shy person for an anthropologist, he asked me how he should begin his study of what I was to call “My Aboriginies.”

“The best way to begin is with eating habits. I would say that a good percentage of the mental energy of these youngsters is involved in such weighty questions as: ‘what’s for eats?’”

And so the Professor began his study with the brave act of attending a meal with the boys. His written observations were as follows:

“A dinner of spaghetti and meatballs with a tossed green salad was served. Five of the six boys of the home attended table. The sixth continued to watch TV contending that he had a headache and wasn’t hungry. The boy at the head of the table filled his platter with a large quantity of spaghetti, doused it with extra sauce and crowned it with ketchup. He ate very well. A second boy put no sauce on his spaghetti, sat low in his chair, used no fork, but simply sucked up the contents of his plate. A third ate nothing but kept asking what was to be provided for snacks later on. The fourth and fifth boys ate so quickly that I had no time to make observations. None touched the salad of lettuce and tomatoes. And I finished it off strictly to avoid waste.”

The Professor's next observation was of breakfast on a school day.

"The six boys drifted in and out of the kitchen between 7 and 7:30 am. The cook took orders. Three of the boys ate healthy meals of eggs, hash browns, orange juice and toast. Two had juice only and went outside for a cigarette which seemed more important than food. When asked if they wanted any solid food, they replied that they got sick when they ate in the morning. They appeared to be content to fill their lungs with smoke. The sixth was a kind of sleepwalker and the cook handed him two English muffins as he went out of the house."

After the Professor observed a few more meals and snacking customs, he felt brave enough to generalize his research. His conclusion reads in part:

"Though the meals were generally well-prepared, the response of the majority was negative. When a particular food such as a cassarole was prepared, it was regarded with suspicion because all the ingredients were not immediately recognized. There was often the murmur: 'Let's go to McDonalds.' It was obvious that junk food was held in high esteem. Given the choice between a packaged item or an item from scratch, the package always won. I was somewhat worried that the boys did not have a balanced diet, but the cook assured me he was trying to make wholesome food look like junk so the boys would eat it."

Study #2 — Room Decor

The Professor had long been a student of art forms in primitive cultures. He had hoped to draw some universal about the adolescent's value system, religion or culture in making a study of their private dwellings where they were

allowed to express themselves. I'm afraid he was somewhat disappointed as he recounts his findings.

"Three of the four rooms I observed had almost identical pictures on the walls. They were color posters which I'm told sell for three or four dollars a piece. The reduplicated posters were as I best remember: 1) The face of a demon. He had green eyes, a red-yellow alligator complexion, teeth of all different sizes and knife-like, hair of red flames. 2) Miniature men in loin cloths walking through what seemed to be a rubbish dumping ground — broken bottles, brambles. Central to the picture were several human skulls. 3) The green marijuana leaf against a background of blue and gold lines which made me somewhat dizzy when I concentrated on the picture. 4) A mouse in party attire with a lighted match pausing before a mouse trap with a marijuana cigarette as bait. 5) A green, demonized version of a bulging muscle Mr. America type. 6) A cobra 7) A black panther 8) A skeletal ship 9) A haunted looking house."

"In these three rooms with identical posters, give or take a few monster or demon variations, the boys had what they called black lights. I was demonstrated the effect of this lighting against the specially treated paper the posters were made of. I was informed that seeing these pictures under certain conditions with the black light was a "trip." When I inquired as to the meaning of "trip" I got answers which weren't too intellectually fulfilling, like "it helps me to mellow out." I wasn't aware of any of the three being under any great stress from the expectations of school or home life. But there must have been a more subtle stress that had to do with self-image, fear of death, need of power, etc."

The professor then moved his research to our other home which had six bedrooms used by the boys. After inspecting the rooms he looked exasperated.

"What's wrong, professor? You look disappointed."

"I'm not exactly disappointed. But your second Home destroys my thesis. I was all set to write a paper on: "The Relationship of Fear and the Need for Power as Manifested

in Adolescent Art Preference.” But not in one of the rooms of this home did I find any of the art prevalent in the first home. To my amazement I found many diverse cultural expressions.”

“One 17 yearold’s room had many macrame wall-hangings. I was told that he made them himself. His room was his workshop and sales office. I even found one I liked and purchased it from the boy.”

“Another 17 yearold had a Star Trek motif on his walls. He was consumed by interest in electronic games. He engaged me in competition in everything from pong tennis to blackjack. I could not begin to compete with his skill.”

“A sixteen yearold not nothing on his walls. I noticed a hamper cage on his dresser with no hamper. I asked him about the empty cage. He said: ‘Listen.’ There was a ruffling noise within a wall of his room. ‘My hamper is in the wall. Father patched a hole in my wall and didn’t know he was in there.’”

“Another room was shared by a 16 yearold and a 15 yearold. Again there were no pictures on the walls except those of family and friends.”

“The final room I observed had two pictures, one of an old Indian Chief and one which in olden times was called a ‘pinup.’”

After listening to the Professor I asked him to universalize his inductive study.

“I can’t figure it,” he kept muttering. “There are no conclusions. Neanderthal Man was so easy to describe.”

Study #3

Wall Scars

One evening the Professor showed me slide films of the civilization of the Aztecs. I marveled that many of the buildings of these ancient peoples could still be visited. I pointed to the picture of a particular structure and remarked: "That's what we should have for our boys' home. Neither the years nor civilizations have destroyed it."

In reply the Professor quipped sarcastically, "Some of your boys would find a way to ruin it."

From that conversation the Professor and I began to discuss the problem of damage, deterioration and depreciation in the typical childcare facility. He had noticed that half of the windows in both homes were plexi-glass (plastic) and many of the walls bore scar tissue. He asked me for a kind of historical explanation of the mixed glass and patched walls. As we walked through the house, I recalled as best I could the incidents that led to window and wall breaking.

"The reason for plexi-glass in this window dates to 1977 when James Dundy upon arriving home from school went to the weight room to get his wristwatch where he had left it. He found it missing. "Someone stole my watch," he thought. In anger he punched out a window. He cut an artery and had to be stitched up. Then he remembered he had given his watch to a girl at school to hold for him when he was playing baseball."

I moved on to one of the boy's bedrooms. "The reason for plexi-glass in this window dates to 1974 when one of the boys tried to open his window from the outside and forced the break; he had put a dummy in his bed and sneaked out. I locked all the doors of the house and his window to force him to come to the back door where I would be waiting for him. But he just didn't cooperate with my plan!"

"The patches in the sheetrock wall date to 1973 when

Vince Planter threw the pots he made in crafts class against the wall in imitation of the Greek custom of breaking plates on festive occasions.”

The professor interrupted my narrative to point to the half-inch panels covering many walls of the home. I too expressed admiration of the Greek custom of breaking plates on festive occasions.”

“I got tired of patching walls and painting. I feel that if a boy wants to punch or kick one of these thick panels, he will know he has been in a fight. Sheetrock is like punching paper. I haven’t had a case yet of a boy punching one of those walls.”

As we passed through the dining room, he noticed four new holes in a wall and asked me why it had not been repaired. I explained:

“One of the boys was angry with another boy yesterday because he was delaying the group activity. In utter desperation he threw a chair against the wall.”

The Professor questioned me. “Can’t you devise some sort of ventilation area where the boys can let out their frustrations without destroying property or each other?”

I gave way to sarcasm. “Do the Greeks use plexi-glass dinner plates so they won’t have breakage when they want catharsis? But the fact of the matter is that I did install a “ventilation area” complete with body-bag, punching bag and weights. I encouraged the boys to hit the bags. I went so far as encouraging them to see me in the bag if their anger was directed at me. Do you think they would use the bags when angry?”

“I suppose anger wouldn’t be anger if it proceeded in a rational and orderly manner.” The Professor had hit it on the head.

We passed through the kitchen and I explained that we had just remodeled it so none of the old battle scars were visible. But I did tell the Professor about that day in 1972 when one of the boys, Roger, age 15, kicked through the pantry wall. He had been angry at the other boys because they left for a trip to the river without him. I recall screaming at Roger, calling him a “savage”. I am em-

barrassed to indulge in this kind of confessional self-revelation. But my instinct at the time was based on the fact that Roger always claimed to be reasonable. Even when he ran away and I picked him up in the process, he rationalized his act of runaway as a "temporary vacation".

"Did Roger turn out to be a savage?"

"Actually, he was a nice kid, Professor. I have a picture of him in my priest's uniform. People who see the picture ask who the priest is."

"I suppose boys' homes should be modeled after war-time bunkers," remarked the Professor at the conclusion of my tour through the house. I nodded assent. But deep in my heart I knew solid granite wouldn't solve the problem of destruction. There would always be pillows and mat-

tresses, curtains and furniture and all the moveable articles necessary for a semi-comfortable existence.

Study #4

The Problem of Homosexuality

Being both honest and thorough, the Professor did not neglect inquiring into ethical questions. He rather bluntly asked me: "Would you admit an adolescent homosexual into your Homes?"

"I can answer that very simply. No."

"Why?"

"First of all, Professor, I'm a puritan. It would bother me. But I have a more fundamental reason. It would be destructive to the other boys."

“How do you know it would be destructive — in our enlightened times? Would it be that big a deal?”

“I guess the best way I can express my feelings is by an example. In 1971 we took a boy into our home, a 14 year-old probation ward. I was told at the time that he had an older friend, but being naive, I did not check into the details of his friendship with the older person. One day our 14 yearold invited his 21 yearold male friend to the home. I found them kissing in the hallway. It was not the embrace one sees in documentaries of middle eastern men. And I witnessed the obvious fact that the 14 yearold was the dominant party in the relationship.”

“How did you handle the situation?” Reganeet was on the edge of his chair.

“I tried counseling the youngster. I was rather direct in telling him he couldn’t carry on such a relationship while being a member of our group home. The boy did not accept my ethics and ran away.”

“Don’t you think you were too quick to reject the boy?”

“I don’t think so, Professor. There’s a common notion that because a child is not legally an adult, that he can be molded. But I’ve seen young people hardened in their ways. This 14 yearold had lived for a year in a homosexual relationship. He was not going to be a ‘good boy’ — go to school, play sports, etc. I’m sorry to sound so fatalistic, but he was wasted at 14.”

“And the other boys would not have accepted his life style?”

“No. If you don’t believe me, conduct an experiment where two guys are seen kissing in the halls of a boys’ home. Most kids are not aware of all the subtle rationalizations of the gay philosophy.”

“Are you suggesting I should conduct an experiment?”

“Let’s discuss religion.”

Study #5

Adolescents and Religion

Reganeet went for the bait. We discussed religion. I record here the taped conversation I had with him August 9, 1975. These thoughts were the basis for his article which appeared in the Psycho-religious Quarterly entitled: "The Religiousity of Adolescent Rebellion." The tape begins with the Professor's inquiry.

"Are most of your boys baptized in the Catholic faith?"

"I can't really say because I never took statistics. It's strange, because when I was a theology student I did work on a parish census, going from door to door inquiring about religious affiliation."

"Why then wouldn't you make the effort to keep statistics on the religious faith of the boys in your home?"

"I know some would say I'm afflicted with the heresy of Indifferentism, but I just can't get excited about sociology. I've seen too many people wear the badge of Catholicism and not know Christ in the sense of helping the distressed. . . . I think we're drifting from our intended subject."

"Not so fast. As a professional parent, don't you think you should at least know the technical religious affiliation of the boys in your care? Many questions rush to my mind. Would you have an atheist infecting the belief of others? What if you had a Jehovah Witness and his legal guardian complained about your decision to allow a blood transfusion? How would a Mormon parent feel about his child living with a Catholic priest?

"It's not like that, Professor. These questions aren't important. Our Agency has the physical custody of the boys. Even if the parent who is legal guardian objects, the court's decision is the boy be with me. Let's go back to your problem of having an atheist in the home. To be honest, I don't recall any boy really claiming to be an atheist. Once when I took a 16 yearold to the Medical Center because of a

drug overdose, the nurse at admissions asked him to state "religious preference". In slow and halting speech the boy said: 'atheist.' I looked at the nurse and told her (for the boy's benefit) to put down 'Catholic.' It was a meaningless question in this context. But I had gone to all the trouble of trying to help the kid. Why should I have let him get away with the privilege of being a non-believer?"

"Sounds like you profess the mission philosophy which encourages forced conversions."

"Don't make too much of the incident I just related, Professor. The kid was wasted and angry with me. He just wanted a little negative attention to add to his storehouse. I wasn't willing to give it to him. We can discuss this whole topic of 'negative attention' in a future interview. I'm sure I have enough material for a volume or two . . . But getting back to your question about my knowing the religious affiliation of my boys . . . Yes, I've had sons of Protestant, Jewish, Mormon, Jehovah Witness and even Black Muslim parents. And when religion has been important to the family, I have been aware of it."

"Is there any reaction of a parent who discovers a son is living with a Catholic priest?"

"Sometimes it takes a month or so before the kid knows I'm a priest. I only wear the uniform when I visit a hospital or prison. But to answer you more directly, there's no strong reaction. The Mormon parents of a boy were once mildly upset when he learned their boy was placed with me. But it was just a initial reaction."

"I find it strange and unusual that a Mormon child should end up in placement outside a Mormon home. How did that happen?"

"In this case the youngster, a drug-oriented 14 yearold was placed in a Mormon group home. But he would not keep their rules just as he would not keep his parents.' So he was dismissed. We were a last resort."

"How did that affect his family?"

"As you know, Mormons are strong family people. To have a child alienated and physically separated is most distressing. Their theology emphasizes family unity in this life

and the next. And it's strange how things turned out for this boy. He returned home after three years and decided to accept his parents' values. Then his parents divorced, and he had that to cope with. Life just can't be simple."

"Have you had many boys with a strict religious upbringing?"

"In general, most of the boys have not had too much exposure to formal religion. Some of the Black kids have had a Baptist background..."

"What effect has the Baptist background or any other religious background had on the mental health of the boys?"

"Generally speaking, I feel that the boy with a religious background, even if it did tend to excess, gives the boy a better sense of security. And there is a sense of values. You can talk about right and wrong and they know what you are talking about. You don't have to get into the kind of psychological games and arguments about what constitutes right and wrong."

"I would think that excessive religion would create a sociopath, one without any conscience. Even the ancients knew that one excess bred another."

"By 'excessive' I was more referring to the foot-stomping enthusiasm of revival religion. Excess in the sense of repressive measures like not allowing children to go out and play, forcing them to kneel during dinner, lockups and severe spankings done in the name of religion: yes, these so-called religious expressions create sociopaths. And I've had some victims of this kind of 'religion'!"

"Since most of your boys have not been exposed to any formal religious upbringing, how do they take to calling you 'Father'. Your title does carry authority and rather powerful religious symbolism."

"My boys have had very little trouble with that title. I find this amazing since most have had such negative experiences with their natural Fathers, if they even had the chance to know one. On the other hand, some of my employees over the years found it hard to get used to. It contains a lot of power. I don't push titles with those who

are uncomfortable. Are you uncomfortable with 'Father', Professor?"

"No sir, I mean no, Father. Tell me, do you have a Church service for your boys? Can they go to the Church of their choice?"

"Your second question is strictly academic. The boys can go to the Church of their choice. But not once in 8 years has anyone requested to go to a Church of their choice. In answer to the first part, I don't have a service for the boys as such, but they can accompany me to the University Newman Center where I have a service geared for young children. Some have taken advantage of this opportunity, if not from strictly mystical motivation at least from the advantage of going to a restaurant for breakfast after the service."

"Why don't you have a service for your boys?"

"It may sound strange, but I don't feel that most of them are ready for formal religion. Lending moral force to get them in a church would be giving them one more thing to rebel against. And they don't need that. I know all these kids would go to Church if they were in a lock-up institution. But that would be for reasons of socializing with the girls."

"Thus far you haven't given me any statistics. Aren't you at least curious about the statistical breakdown of your boys into the categories of Protestant, Catholic, Jew, etc.?"

"Professor, I don't want to give you the impression I don't think it important. But formal religious affiliation is like the frosting on the cake. I'm just trying to get the basic batter together."

"I'll change the subject. Have you had any boys interested in the cult of the devil?"

"Not really. Though one boy came with a social study which indicated he practiced Satanism. There was mention of his room in his own home being decorated with altar, candles and satanic liturgy books."

"Weren't you afraid to take such a boy into your program? That sounds somewhat spooky."

"The way I had it figured, Professor, the kid was

trying to get even with his religious mother for turning him in for the possession of marijuana.”

“Did the boy continue to worship Satan while under your care?”

“He never was interested in Satan. All he wanted to do was freak-out his mother. As a matter of fact, he turned out to be a nice boy. He comes around from time to time just to chat. And he even learned how to get along with his mother.”

At this point my tape broke, and I do not have the rest of my conversation with the Professor. I do remember that we got into a heavy discussion of the Augustinian versus Pelagian worldview. And I recall associating the worldview of my boys with the Augustinian theological excess which is popularly expressed: “The Devil Made Me Do It!”

Study #6

The Potential Alcoholic

The Professor walked into the Home one Saturday night about 9:30 and found me and five of the boys standing around the toilet in the bathroom adjacent to the staff room. I was just about to pull the lever when I caught the Professor’s eye. I invited him to take a look.

“My God!” he gasped. “Blood. Someone needs to see a doctor.”

“That’s not blood, Professor. It’s wine, 20 percent. The boys call it ‘Mad Dog’. I poured a bottle of it in the toilet — and it’s not to unclog the plumbing.”

“Father Castagnola, this is a very unusual home. Every time I come over I feel I have new material for my research. Why would you be having a group activity — or

should I say 'religious' ceremony — with serving wine to the alligators?"

"Have you got a few minutes, Professor? I tell you the story behind the libation."

"I would be most interested."

"Well earlier this morning we had room changes. We have a system here of more-or-less privileged rooms. Jose and Larry got busted for successfully germinating an illegal plant in their closet so they were transferred to the room closest to the front door (symbolic reasons). Thad and Darrell moved to Richard's room and Richard took over Jose and Larry's room. Darrell moved his mattress to his new room. And Dennis, the houseparent, discovered the 'Mad Dog' on his box spring. It was in the open with no attempt at concealment."

"It seems an open-and-shut case. Darrell forgot he had a bottle of wine hidden under his mattress." The Professor was confident he had the case solved.

"Not so fast, Professor Reganeet. It would seem that way by appearances. But I am absolutely certain that Darrell is not into drugs and especially 'Mad Dog', a wine notorious among those who drink to get drunk."

"Well, if it wasn't Darrell, it had to be his roommate. Do you feel Thad set him up to get caught?"

"He may not have purposely have set up his roommate to get caught, although I'm not eliminating that possibility. But here is what I feel happened. The room change came as a sudden announcement to Thad. The houseparent and his assistant were involved in the process. Thad had a moment of panic. He remembered the wine beneath his mattress. He had three alternatives: 1) Throw the bottle out his window. 2) Conceal it on his person, walk out of the house and hide it in the yard 3) Put it on his roommate's bed so that he or someone else would take the blame for it. The first alternative was an automatic bust because I had put masking tape around the screen so I would be aware of its removal. The second alternative was risky because of the two staff members involved in the room change process. So the third alternative was the safest."

"But why would Thad try to get his roommate in trouble? Weren't they getting along?" The Professor was now asking the questions of a detective.

"There's one detail I mentioned to neglect. Along with the bottle there was a blanket on the box spring. If there had just been the bottle it would have been easy to have surmised that the bottle was already under the mattress and Darrell just didn't see it in removing the mattress. But the presence of the blanket indicated that someone put both bottle and blanket on the box spring."

"Now I'm confused." The professor couldn't follow my reasoning about the blanket's relevance.

"Can't you see that Thad didn't want the blame on his roommate so he made it appear that 'somebody' put a blanket and a bottle on his roommate's bed. If I were to confront him with doing it, he would simply say: 'Do you think I'm crazy. If it was mine, I would have put it inside my shirt and walked out of the house.' So with his 'blanket scheme' he made it appear that some outside party set up both him and his roommate."

"But how can you be sure it was Thad? Your method of conviction seems rather tenuous as well as your evidence."

"I can't prove it, Professor. But I know Thad's style. Ever since he has come to the home there have been incidents of a similar nature. I know all the habits of the other boys. And they are non-drinkers. I won't convict Thad. But I will write up the incident, file it in my category of 'mysterious happenings' and then when I have enough similar cases all pointing to him, suitable action will be taken. In the meantime I am doubling surveillance on him."

"There's just one last question, Father Castagnola. Why did you hold a ritual of inviting the boys in the bathroom and pouring the contents into the toilet? Could not someone have used the remainder for cooking?"

"It was just instinct, Professor. Being a priest I have a kind of need for ritual. Besides I wanted to impress the guilty party that with the fact he wasted his money."

"And what was the suspect's reaction during the

ceremony?" (The Professor couldn't limit himself to one last question).

"Thad simply remarked: 'A guy would have to have a problem to drink that stuff. Now if I did some drinking, it would be quality beer.'"

"Since That denied his own personal implication and you stated intention of simply storing the information for future reference, were you ever able to solve the 'crime' with indisputable evidence?"

"Yes, Professor. For two weeks after the incident Thad was apprehended by a store clerk for attempting to steal a bottle of the very same wine: Mad Dog 20/20. For me, this was conclusive."

"Did Thad finally admit to being the owner of the previous bottle?"

"Not really. He said he was tempted to steal this bottle because after our last investigation he was curious about the effect of Mad Dog."

After we finished our discussion of the "Mad Dog caper", the Professor kept me up all night with questions about adolescents and alcohol. I didn't have much to enlighten him with except my personal observation that it was easy to catch kids who used alcohol. And I couldn't conceive of a teenager becoming an alcoholic if he had someone watching him.

Study #7

Juvenile Delinquency

In the case of professional research, I allowed Reganeet to go through my confidential case files. He had always wanted to study the causes of juvenile delinquency. He felt

that since most of the Castagnola boys had been what the courts call 602's (delinquent), he had great source material. He spent months going through the case files and produced a major contribution to the behavioral sciences in his 800 page study: "*Delinquency: An In-depth Study of Causes and Effects*". He popularized his findings in a 200 page paperback entitled: *Profiles in Delinquency*. It is from this latter work that I now take excerpts.

"From the Castagnola files I formulated a kind of descriptive definition of the juvenile delinquent. And with all its limitations I offer it as follows. 'The juvenile delinquent is one who by the age of 13 has a fixed pattern of alienation towards the adult world that the only friendships he can form are those of utility.' In explaining this definition I must note that the age of 13 is a mean age (excuse the pun). Some become fixed in alienation before this age, some after. And while it is true that all adolescents go through a period of alienation towards the adult world, the delinquent is characterized by the *fixed nature* of this alienation. On the surface he may be friendly, but he is determined not to let his guard of mistrust down. As a younger child he had wanted a living relationship with a parent. But when the moment of enlightened disillusionment came, he made up his mind he could do without parents in particular and adults in general."

The Professor outlined his conclusions briefly:

CATEGORY	THE DELINQUENT	THE NONDELINQUENT
1) use of grass	Smokes it; plants it, sells it.	May or may not smoke it.
2) Theft	Will always steal if he sees risk is good.	Does not steal. Learns lesson after 1st theft.
3) Lies	Has developed the "straight face."	Sense of guilt if he lies.
4) School	either truants or uses it simply for social contacts.	May truant but settles down when put in suitable program.
5) Relationship Authority	Cannot trust	Most often develops trust if adults are honest
6) Relationships	Always of utility	Searches for meaning.

After I read the Professor's definition and schematization, I shouted, "Right-on". (That was an expression used by the boys in the early '70's, a variation of which was "right arm"). I was amazed that a man who had not worked with delinquents had penetrated to the essentials. And the Professor in turn asked me a question which I had pondered over the years: "Do you feel that the court in designating a boy 'delinquent' hardens him in a role he feels he must carry out?"

I answered from experience. "Professor, it's only obvious that when a mother tells a son he is 'no good', he will most often try to prove her right. But I don't feel the courts should feel guilty in categorizing young offenders. If a boy does delinquent acts, he should be called delinquent. If I have any criticism for the courts, it is they are too lenient with the 12, 13, 14 and 15 yearolds. There are some hardened kids in these age categories. And all they get is admonitions when they steal cars or rob houses. Leniency generally reinforces their negative behavior."

The Professor moved on to another question directed at my experience. "Father Cas, are you able to discern a delinquent personality on the basis of an interview?"

"Interviews are deceptive, Professor. Very often it is a mark of the delinquent to have a polite facade. He wants to get out of juvenile hall. And he knows the answers I want to hear. Very often it is the boy who makes the poorest impression in his placement interview that does better in the Home. I don't know if I answered you, Professor."

Our discussion ended here. I had little statistical information to offer. I directed the Professor to the Youth Authority for information on hardcore delinquency.

Study #8

Ethnic Backgrounds

The Professor was disappointed I could give him no exact statistics on the racial-ethnic backgrounds of all the boys I have had in our Homes.

So he had to be satisfied with a survey of the current sixteen residents. He felt he had a good situation for an article he was to later entitle: "The Effects of Ethnic and Racial Backgrounds in the Adolescent Group Living Situation" since the current composition of boys was 5 Blacks, 5 Chicanos, 5 Whites and 1 Indian. He wrote as follows:

"I was surprised to find that among the Blacks there was no strong bond of solidarity based on racial origins. The youngest of the Blacks felt a kind of kinship with the oldest, an 18 yearold. There was a note of hero worship for a 'big brother type' who had his act together. The 13 year-old struggled very hard to overcome problems with his explosive temper. And I was told by the counselors he had made substantial progress due to the positive influence of the older boy. The other Blacks were not so tolerant of the 13 yearold. I heard one 15 yearold comment: 'If he is a Black, I'm Jamaican.' And he proceeded to comically flaunt a Jamaican accent.

"Four of the five Blacks were dependents of the Court and came from backgrounds of relative poverty. The fifth was a probation ward and was from an upper-middle class economic background. All were conscious of presenting a good appearance and took meticulous care of clothes and possessions.

"Among the Mexican Americans there was indication of racial-cultural solidarity among three of the five. In my opinion the solidarity was not so much based on race as it was on similar superficial things. There was solidarity in a love for the "uniform", i.e. kakis, trench coat, ear-ring and short hair. When each of the three was separated from each other, they integrated perfectly. But as a group, they

made it known they weren't like the Whites or Blacks. And these three didn't consider the other two Chicano boys part of their race. They were not street kids but had been brought up in foster homes and institutions not specifically Mexican.

"While it was obvious that the Chicano kids with the ear-rings and trench coats were trying to form an identity with a specific street culture, the Whites had no such point of cultural identity. Two of the five whites were dependent, "nice-guy" types who minded their own business, two were delinquently orientated and were on frequent power trips, while the fifth vascillated from dependency to delinquency. He was at the mercy of his proneness to follow."

I have synopsisized the professor's thought by picking out the more important passages. I had warned him that trying to form some kind of statistical stereotypes on race and culture in our setting would be an impossibility. It was interesting to read that Reganeet did discover quite accidentally that a unique kind of therapy did take place in the situation of the young Black who modeled his behavior after the more mature Black. But this conclusion was not surprising and hardly needed any spelling out.

As for the Indian boy, Reganeet did not have much to say except he was passive. He even more than the Whites had no consciousness of racial heritage. I quote his observation:

"The American Indian Youth seemed almost unconscious of the fact he was a full-blooded tribal Indian. He did not relate to things of the stereotyped Indian culture though he lived all his life among his people. While he would pal around with the more delinquent Mexican kids, his more positive moments were spent with a Black he admired. This youth seemed to have no ambition other than to get through life with as little effort as possible. However he was making progress in the group setting. The peer pressure had made him give up his deathly habit of sniffing dangerous solvents..."

In general, Reganeet was impressed with what he

called a “cultural crossroad” and felt all the boys benefited to the exposure of boys they would have avoided in their own home areas had they not been in placement.

Study #9

The Challenging Placement

I knew Reganeet would ask me the inevitable: “Do you enjoy your work?” I was not really prepared to answer him. If he caught me on a good day, I would have said ‘yes’. But if he had caught me on a day filled with conferences about school failures, I might have just sneered. Fortunately, he caught me on a neutral day when I could answer philosophically: “I enjoy seeing certain boys develop. Those who do make up for the ones who don’t.”

“Please tell me about one who did develop.” The Professor was interested enough to take out his notepad.

I prefaced my remarks to Reganeet with the wisdom saying: “There is no pleasure without pain.” For the boy I was to describe caused me many days of irritation, frustration and even that emotion so unbecoming a philosopher, **Anger.**

Victor came to us at 16. In his court file there was a psychological that described him as severely retarded. Also he had committed delinquent acts, mainly in the role of follower. He had not been in school for the past two years because he was either placed in a regular or continuation program. His pattern was to truant or disrupt. He had a quick temper, which he called his ‘temperature.’”

“Why did you take him in your program? You’re not equipped to deal with retarded kids.” The Professor’s remark was right on target.

"I agree we're not equipped to deal with serious retardation. But I was not convinced about Victor's retardation. While it was true he didn't know the alphabet, he did know how to use a power saw, maintain a power lawnmower, operate a dishwasher and various other mechanical devices. He quickly established himself as the most thorough worker among the more mentally gifted boys of the Home. And he had a degree of sophistication when it came to delinquent acts, that I could not believe he was a candidate for an institution."

"What kind of a school program did you find for him? How would a boy with a certain delinquent sophistication fit in with other retarded kids?"

"I was coming to that point, Professor. Fortunately, the psychologist for our school district had a different opinion than the previous tester. He found Victor more a victim of cultural deprivation than falling into the category of severely retarded. So he was a candidate for a learning disability class in a regular high school. In the specialized class, a teacher would start from the beginning with him."

"Did he function in the specialized class? Did he learn the alphabet?" The Professor was pushing me along.

"Actually he only lasted three weeks in that class. His delinquency got in the way of the learning process. One of the boys told him to shut up when he was being disruptive, and he hit the boy. As Victor put it, 'My temperature got the best of me.' So we put him on home instruction, one hour a day. And he has functioned with his tutor, a woman from the school district.

"She must be a saint." The Professor was on target again.

"Yes, I really don't know if we could have held him in our program if the District hadn't come through. And the Foster Youth Program found him a 20 hour a week janitorial job at the School District Office.

"It sounds like Victor adjusted pretty well. Why did you say at the start that he was irritating? Does he keep a messy room?" I could see the Professor was trying to keep me honest.

"The fact is, Professor, he is the neatest of all the boys. And now that you ask me, I really can't think of a reason why he makes me so angry. I wasn't really that angry when he called me at 3 am from his home visit pretending he was in jail for drunkenness. And I wasn't really that angry with him when he got into a fight with Richard at the Roller Rink. I guess what it is . . ." the Professor interrupted me at this point. He would rather come to his own conclusions than have me explain things to him.

"I would wager that what irritates you most about Victor is the ability he has to act retarded when he does something wrong?"

"That's it! I wasn't sure of it myself. But that's exactly it! He gets foulmouthed when I put him on restriction or treat him like the others. It's as though I should be nicer to him because he doesn't understand directions. And there's one other thing. He sets me up to get angry, like continually knocking on my door when I'm talking to someone. Then when he sees me angry, he laughs. It's a form of entertainment for him."

"Does anger have any effect with him? Do threats or fear of punishment have any effect on him?"

"No. He simply reminds me that his mother was not able to control him and that I would have no control over him unless he granted it to me."

"Has he granted it?" the Professor always got to the basics.

"I feel that he has — as much as he will grant it to anyone. He is feeling pretty good about himself, shows a desire to learn and work. And if his 'temperature' doesn't get him into trouble, I don't mind him setting me up to get angry. After all, he doesn't watch TV and he has to have some form of entertainment."

I left the Professor only with a superficial glimpse of Victor. There was more to come at a later interview.

Study #10

Negative Attention

The Professor had just finished asking the boys about their views of the local police force when I asked him to do a study on the question of negative attention. He looked at me as though overwhelmed by the request. "How does one even begin to analyze this problem? Every time I enter your room to have a private conversation we are interrupted by the boys banging on your door. They seem to resent your talking to me. Why there's a boy with his nose pressed against your window now. What does he want? Attention. He wants you to tell him to go away. He wants you to get mad at him. I can at least go to my private study. But you are surrounded by the attention seekers. Am I not correct to say: 'You are the victim of negative attention'?"

The Professor stunned me with his remarks. I hadn't really thought of my request any differently than my asking him to observe eating habits and room decor. I suppose he was right to an extent. I felt somewhat guilty. I had hoped that our boys were receiving positive strokes. I had asked the Professor to do the research. And now I wondered if I was really the 'victim' of negative attention. And if so, how was I to get out of this role. The Professor began his investigation by asking a startling question.

"Has any boy in your 8 years of existence sought your attention by wrist-slashing?"

I had seen some of this behavior when I was chaplain for a girls' home. It only happened once in our Home. I had wanted to keep it a dark secret. But the Professor insisted.

"I've already told you a little about Victor. Well, he and his roommate waited for me one Friday evening. I was late, and hadn't paid them their allowance. They were patient in waiting. I put three dollars in Victor's hands; and the two asked permission to go to the corner store. I told them to be back in a half hour. They went their merry way, presumably to get cigarettes. They came back a half hour

later smoking their wretched cigarettes, but they couldn't quite conceal the smell of alcohol, bourbon to be exact. Both were given their due penalties, a week of restriction and 15 hours of work. Victor accepted the restriction and was rather jovial for the evening, while his partner remained quietly paranoid. Then at bedtime Victor went to his room."

"Now don't tell me he went to his room and cut his wrist." The Professor couldn't see any connection between the story I was relating and his pointed question. He was a man of few words, a true scientist. I tended to be flowery, a true preacher.

"Not so fast, Professor. Victor went to his room where his partner had fallen asleep. I went into the room of the remaining two boys who were awake. They had requested a bedtime story. They handed me a magazine with the title: 'The Further Adventures of Pinocchio'. At first I was suspicious, but was reassured when I saw it was a Disney publication."

"How did we get from wrist-slashing to Pinocchio?" The Professor was impatient, but still curious.

"I had just got to the part where Pinnochio once again refused to listen to Jiminey Cricket and Lampwick with the stupid cat, Gideon, had taken his penny on a false promise when Victor popped his head in the room and asked for a nickel. He needed a nickel to have enough money to use the pay phone right outside the bedroom where I was reading the story. I told him I didn't have a nickel and cautioned him not to use the phone at this late hour. He found the nickel he needed and placed his call. It was to the police. I listened to him tell the police that 'the priest who ran the home was fighting him.'"

"Were you fighting him?"

"Professor, you know me better than that. I learned a long time ago there are certain boys you don't even tough, let alone fight. Victor was one of these. He had in his last home accused the parent of hitting him and the home lost its license."

"He really didn't call the police, did he? Wasn't it a

practical joke to get your attention? After all, you were showing attention to the other two boys. Perhaps he felt left out."

"I thought he was joking, Professor, until I answered the same phone five minutes later. It was the City Police answering the complaint about some priest abusing a child. I told the police to come out and investigate. I explained I had a drunk teenager who made the call. They told me they had better things to do than answer prank calls."

"Why did Victor make the call? Had you threatened him? Or did he think you had threatened him?"

"On the contrary, I was too lenient with him. I was still giving him the option of going on a weekend home visit if he behaved himself. After his call I turned to him and said: 'Forget about your weekend visit, Victor. I'm not forgetting this for a long time. I ought to throw the key away.'"

"I don't understand what you meant by saying: 'I ought to throw the key away.'"

"I was saying in jail language, 'I ought to keep you on restriction forever.'"

"So what did Victor do next?"

"He went to his room for a few minutes and then returned to use the phone. I was still reading the Pinocchio story, waiting for the puppet to become a real live boy, when Victor dialed the phone. This time it was long distance and he feigned a crying voice. I wasn't interested in playing his game of seeking attention so I went on with the story. Ten minutes later after Pinocchio proved himself brave and trustworthy I retired to my room."

"And what about Victor?"

"I had assumed he was all right. But five minutes later he came to my room holding a cloth over a severe cut on his forearm. He asked me to take him to the hospital. He had purposely cut himself."

"And you took him to the hospital?"

"Yes, he finally got my undivided attention."

"Why do you think he did it? Do you feel it was simply the desire to get attention?"

"Nothing is simple in human behavior, Professor. I'm

not so sure he wanted my attention. This was not the first time he cut himself. But it was the first time he did it in my Home. It may have been his way of getting his mother's attention. In calling the police he was trying to tell her that adults were abusing him. When this plan backfired, he had to find a way of saying: 'See what I am forced to do!'"

"Sounds like a sick kid to want that kind of attention. Was his plan successful?"

"He didn't get to first base with it. He did this once before and got away with it in the sense that he was removed from the group home."

"Getting back to the intent of my original question, do you feel there was anything suicidal in the self-mutilation?"

"I don't think so, Professor. Obviously the kid is hurting. But he was too intent on my feeling guilty for denying him a home visit. Earlier in the week he had tried to punish me in a similar way. I had made him ride a bike to his job instead of getting a ride by car. His behavior had been poor so I took away the privilege of a ride. So to teach me a lesson he came home that evening with a smashed rear wheel on the bike and a story about how he was hit by a car. He showed me a bruise on his arm (which had an old scab) and made me aware he was lucky to be alive. And the implication was that I used poor judgement in forcing him to ride a bike."

"Was he in fact hit by a car?"

"Now, figure it out, Professor. The frame wasn't bent. And the only bruise he had was at least a week old. He probably kicked in the back wheel, but I can't prove it."

"What's the case plan for Victor? How do you break his pattern of seeking negative attention?"

"The textbook answer is simple. I just need to give him strokes for his positive behavior and consistent discipline for his negative behavior. But Victor isn't your usual textbook prototype."

"Shouldn't such a person be in a psychiatric or correctional facility?"

"I can't say, Professor. He's too delinquent for any psychiatric facility I know of. And he gets suicidally

depressed in a correctional lock-up facility. We may be able to help him if I have the will to control him.”

“And what if he refuses to hand over the controls to you? Is control all that necessary? After all, Geppetto lost control of Pinocchio and the puppet achieved self-realization with the help of Conscience.”

This last remark of the Professor left me speechless. I pondered his allusion to the puppet. I had to have the last word.

“Yes, Professor. Geppetto gave the boy space to fail. But Pinoke in his state of becomming couldn’t bleed to death.”

Study #11

The Meaning of Therapy

I had invited Reganeet to our weekly psychiatric consultation. This was a time when staff and I would discuss a particular boy’s case in the company of our Home psychiatrist who had previously interviewed the boy. After our session Reganeet had his usual battery of questions.

“I’m a little unsure of what I witnessed today. Your psychiatrist saw a boy for an hour. Can I rightly say that was ‘psychotherapy-in-process’?”

“Professor, you always seem to come up with the mind-twisters. I don’t feel that our psychiatrist would call his interviews with our boys examples of psychotherapy. They fall more under the category of diagnostic interviews. Psychotherapy would mean the establishment of a relationship between psychiatrist and boy involving frequent contacts.”

"Are any of your boys in a psychotherapeutic relationship?"

"No, one was for a while. But he lost interest."

"Well, since your boys are not getting psychotherapy from a psychiatrist, do you consider your relationship with them therapeutic?" The Professor was getting too heavy with his questions. I didn't know if I could go on answering him.

"I'm not a therapist, Professor. And I have to confess, my boys are not getting psychotherapy."

"But do not the courts indicate that these boys be given therapy? And unless I misread some of the court papers, the judges specified the need for psychotherapy. Are you doing an adequate job?" With this last question I must admit the Professor got to me.

"Look, Professor. This is how it is. A therapist is by most definitions someone who has to be nice and friendly, warm and compassionate to his client. He or she is someone who sets up a relationship to help build up the shattered ego of the patient. I can't always be nice and friendly. Sometimes I have to be angry because that is the only language some of the boys respect. And you can't have therapy if you don't have respect."

"Perhaps creating an atmosphere of respect is indeed therapy, even though the emotion of anger has to be evoked." The Professor was now building up my ego. Was he practicing therapy on me?

"I believe you're right, Professor. Or at least I would like to think we provide a therapeutic atmosphere in our Homes, even though we don't call it psychotherapy."

"So I would surmise that you are keeping the Court directive if your atmosphere is therapeutic. And to be therapeutic an atmosphere is as good as the adults in charge."

"You're right again. The key to making these group homes work is finding the right people to help. You have to avoid two extremes: guards and peers." I was purposely confusing the Professor by my terminology.

"What do you mean, Father, by guards and peers?"

“By a guard I mean the childcare worker who sees his job simply in terms of keeping discipline. He doesn’t enjoy the kids. He never gets dirty by working or playing with them. He feels he is doing his duty by logging in their bad behavior. By a peer I mean the adult who has so completely identified with the boys that he soon finds himself their drinking partner. I’ve had both.”

“What is your definition of an ideal staff?”

“I don’t know if I would dare to define an ideal, Professor. I have had some good people working for me. I suppose the most important thing I look for in their performance is a quality of sincerity. Do they really like the boys in spite of their rough edges? If I can establish that the prospective staff has this ability to see past the surface of the obnoxious remarks he or she will get, then I look for the ability to establish discipline.”

“Why wouldn’t you put the ability to establish discipline in the first place?” What good is a person who likes kids if he or she is being run over by them?”

“Well, Professor Reganeet, as usual you have a good point. But the way I see it, the person who sincerely likes kids usually sees the necessity for discipline and finds ways to establish it. He may make mistakes by giving too much trust, allowing too many breaks. But he will out-last the one who comes on with too much power.”

“I would think the opposite true, Father. Wouldn’t it be easier to relax discipline than try to tighten up after being law?”

“I see your point in most disciplinary situations — school, army, etc. But from what I’ve observed in dealing kids from broken homes, scare tactics and power plays have a reverse effect. They generally were not impressed with their parents or step-parents shouting out commands, and they won’t be impressed with any substitutes.”

“Now I’m utterly confused. How does one go about establishing discipline with these kids? Are you saying that a military approach doesn’t work?”

“I guess that depends on who the sergeant is. They accept discipline. But they have to first perceive you as

caring. If you're sitting back reading a newspaper while they're doing the dishes, they won't perceive you as worth your paycheck."

"So what you're saying, Father, is that even though you're not a therapist in the normal use of the word, you strive to provide an environment where therapy in the wider sense of the word can be attained."

"That's the whole trick to running a group home. Professor — no matter what words you use."

Study #12

Ratio of Success

The Professor had been with us close to six months when he decided to wrap-up his study with some questions about statistics. He asked me questions which usually appear on government census forms: "How many disturbed boys did we treat? How many delinquent boys did we rehabilitate? How many dependent boys did we care for?"

I was always apprehensive about statistics — not to mention the fine line that existed between the terms: delinquent, dependent and disturbed. I could not give the Professor statistics off the top of my head. I resorted to the private files and came up with these conclusions. In our 8 years we admitted 120 boys into our program. Of these, 98 were probation wards and the other 22 were dependents of the court. I gave these figures to Reganeet and he didn't know what to do with them. The expression of his face indicated confusion.

"Are you running a program for delinquents, dependents or the emotionally disturbed?"

Now one would expect that an agency such as ours

would have clear definitions of clients admitted into the program. But I had no neat answer on a 3 by 5 card.

"Most delinquent kids are disturbed. Many disturbed kids are delinquent. Most kids are dependent whether they are delinquent or disturbed. Even the best kid is capable of outrageous behavior." I felt my answer had at once profundity as well as smoke. And the Professor tried to blow away the cloud.

"Are you saying that the categories of the behavioral sciences have no validity? Is there no meaning to words such as delinquent, paranoid, sociopathic, disturbed, etc.?"

"Of course those words are useful, Professor...as long as one doesn't forget the unique person behind the tags. But sometimes words have too much power and the so-called disturbed kid may turn out to be saner than you or me. But we're protected by powerful words like 'priest' or 'professor'."

"I know I've taken up a lot of your time with this study, Father. But I cannot refrain from asking you one last question. Do you feel you've been successful? Am I being too statistical to ask you if you can determine a rate of success?"

"The Bible says Jesus cured ten lepers and one returned to say 'thanks'. His moral effectiveness reached one out of ten. I would say we're batting the same average."

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